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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates action planning and plan goals, primarily from the perspective of the school. The principal research questions were the following: (1) Do principals plan and act locally to implement global policy strategically envisioned by district policymakers? Or (2) Do they plan and act locally in response to local needs and retroactively fit the local plan to a global model? (3) Is there a corresponding difference in the content of their school action plans? An embedded case study method was applied for descriptive and theory-building purposes. The research strategy included personal interviews of 5 administrators, 8 principals, and 13 teachers, and examination of district documents. The result of statistical analyses indicated that the differences in the variables tested were not significant in relationship to the principals' approaches to alignment. Appendices include interview protocols, research question matrices, and various documents regarding transcription rules, preparation, coding, action-plan process development, and district strategic plans. (Contains 15 pages of references.) (DFR)

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An Analysis of School District Strategic Planning Relationships With School Action Planning

Gary David Cohn

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

1999

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Abstract

An Analysis of School District Strategic Planning Relationships With School Action Planning

Gary David Cohn

Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee
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In June 1995, the Southcoast School District board of directors adopted a strategic plan. The goals and objectives of the plan address establishing high standards, focusing on student learning, involving constituents in decision-making, providing high quality support systems, and collaborating with community resources. Action planning is required of each school, and is an alignment tool for realizing district policy intent. Principals approach school action planning from different perspectives. This research investigated action planning and plan goals, primarily from the perspective of the school. The principal research questions were: Do principals plan and act locally to implement global policy strategically envisioned by district policy-makers? Or, do they plan and act locally in response to local needs, and retroactively fit the local plan to a global model? Is there a corresponding difference in the content of their school action plans? This research identified (a) the processes used to construct action plans; (b) principals' and key teachers' perceptions of the key influences on action planning, including state standards and assessments, state school improvement grants, district curriculum implementations, and central office directions; (c) principals' and key teachers' perceptions of the "downward" and "upward" nature by which action plans are linked to the district's strategic plan, and (d) the characteristics of school action plan goal content linkage to the content of the district strategic plan. The result of statistical analyses indicated that the differences in the variables tested were not significant in relationship to the principals' approaches to alignment. An embedded case study method was applied for descriptive and theory-building purposes. The research strategy included personal interviews and examination of district documents. Content analysis of the school district strategic plan and school action plans was employed to develop and triangulate related qualitative data. Key research results include: (a) a common process for tactical planning; (b) descriptions of action planning processes; (c) analysis of two planning approaches described by principals to align schools' goals with district objectives; and (d) comparative characteristics for assessment—through content analysis—of schools' action plan goals.

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You can never plan the future by the past.
Edmund Burke, 1791
Letter to a member of
the National Assembly

Sometimes, I think, the things we see
Are shadows of the things to be,
That what we plan we build,
That every hope that hath been crossed,
And every dream we thought was lost,
In heaven shall be fulfilled.
Phoebe Cary
Dreams and Realities

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

The literature on educational leadership is replete with descriptions of planning tactics and strategies addressing topics including scheduling (Glines, 1990; Navarez, 1995), safety improvement (Watson, 1995), architectural space programming (Taylor, 1993), and complete district-level reform (Henry & Vilz, 1990). Attaching the term "planning" to these many and varied approaches to school change and improvement has brought them to near-sacrosanct levels of regard. Yes, it is commonly understood that planning is good, and that planning cooperatively, or systematically is even better (Walter, 1991). Even prominent national reports, such as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), emphasize the significance of educational planning, characterizing it as a central aspect when undertaking instructional improvement and success (Ray, 1996). Apparently, however, all forms of planning are not equal, nor do they yield the desired results (Kaufman, 1991; Spady & Marshall, 1991; Richardson, 1997).

Strategic Planning as a Nation-wide Trend

Strategic planning has most recently become popularized with many educators attesting to its benefits such as (a) allowing schools to align with societal outcomes (Kaufman & Herman, 1991), (b) ensuring student learning and improved student outcomes (Blum & Kneidek, 1991), (c) enriching both school and community (Woolley & Croteau, 1991), (d) fostering systemic change (Koski, 1993), and (e) improving school climate (Caldwell & Wood, 1992). Regardless of the enthusiasm for strategic planning, much of this literature is popular, not data-based, and the question remains, to what extent and in what forms is strategic planning responsible for these outcomes? Before such questions can be contemplated, the use of strategic planning in education systems must be mapped. To do so will bring us closer to an understanding of how strategic planning contributes to the learning improvement, and how we might avoid simply parroting business in the use of a sophisticated planning tool, for as Conley (1993) proposes:

> Strategic planning may be an institutional isomorphic response by educators, as they attempt to emulate a practice without a clear understanding of its purposes and limitations. As more states require districts to engage in strategic planning (e.g., Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Georgia, Utah), the issue of how educators understand strategic planning conceptually as well as how they operationalize it will become more important. (p. 2)

Evidence indicates a shift from traditional long-range toward more strategic planning approaches has occurred within school districts. This has happened through integration of new planning practices to generate instructional improvement (Thorson, Miller & Bellon, 1987; Fields, 1988). Development of profiling processes to gather student attitude, behavior, and achievement information for school improvement represents an education approach to environmental scanning. Environmental scanning is an essential element of strategic planning—the search for problems to solve with the help of a plan (Blum & Butler, 1985). Educational planners began to incorporate data-driven methods, another hallmark of strategic planning, in response to community problems and needs (Smith, 1994; Wallace, 1985). Some even believe that "many of today's problems are the result of our collective failure to plan;" that without a strategic approach to planning by schools, we cannot anticipate, or even respond, to changes in the job market, changes in the economic structure of society, swelling complaints by business of job applicants' lacking basic skills, and significant societal demographic shifts (Romney, 1996, p. 5). These are significant nation-wide problems that cry for solutions, solutions requiring planning at multiple levels—national, state, district, and school—to be implemented successfully. Nation-wide, the improvement of schools and student achievement are commonplace objectives of school district strategic planning (Conley, 1993).

The State-level Impetus for Strategic Planning

In Washington State one of the major problems confronting school districts is improving the dismal performance of students on new standardized assessments (Harrell, 1998). The state initiated the new Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to coincide with the implementation of its essential academic learning requirements ("EALRs"). Washington decided these assessments would be a key measure of schools' success in achieving their mission. "Of the fourth-graders who voluntarily took the test last spring, only 14.8 percent met the math standard .... In reading, 30.7 percent met the standard .... While 42.2 percent met the test's writing standard ..." (p. A1). In one of the state's large, suburban public school districts, the Southcoast School District, students performed much better than the state average. However, this district also found a large portion of its fourth grade students did not meet the new state learning standards: 34.6 percent met the math standard, 67.1 percent met the reading standard, and 59.3 percent met the writing standard (Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1997). As expected by the governor, state superintendent, and district superintendents, in an era of increasing expectations of accountability in public education it is a problem if fully two-thirds of the students are not able to meet the standard. It is essential that clear plans be visibly in place to change this performance outcome.

The School District as the Unit of Strategic Planning

Within local school districts, strategic planning has evolved as mainly a district-level function in response to the perceptions and needs of the district's patrons. As in so many other school districts, students, parents, and staff in Southcoast, the site of this research, believed performance should improve (Southcoast, 1997). Between 1991-92 and 1995-96, Southcoast's student population grew at a compound annual rate of nearly two percent. In absolute terms, 1,132 full-time equivalent students joined its rolls, an increase of 6.6 percent. During that period the district opened a new junior high school, bringing to 31 the number of schools it operated. During the same four years, its general fund expenditures rose from $85.5 million to $104.8 million, an increase of 22.5 percent, and its per student expenses grew 15 percent, from $4,985 to $5,731 (figures not adjusted for inflation).

A recent survey of school district parents indicated parents had high expectations of the district: they expected the district to effectively educate their children, to adequately involve them in decision-making, to wisely use public resources, and they believed the district could do a better job at these tasks. Table 1 displays the average responses of district parents to five of fifty-five questions included in 1996 and 1997 district-wide surveys (Southcoast, 1997).

Parents, students, and staff were surveyed on key issues, asked in each case how important the issue was, and how the district was doing at the time. Response choices were arrayed on a five-point Likert scale. One represented "very little" and five represented "great extent." Gaps between respondents' average expectation ratings and performance ratings for these selected items were greater than 1.00 in most cases. Parents believed the district needed to improve, and the district has been responding organizationally to improve performance objectives through its strategic planning process.

Requisites for Planning Strategically

Popular literature abounds with theories and examples of successful organizational strategizing to achieve performance objectives (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Kanter, 1983; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Peters & Austin, 1985; Peters, 1987). Strategic planning has been offered by scholars and business practitioners alike as a technique for organizational success in the market place (Cope, 1987, 1989; Porter, 1980, 1985). Strategic planning is a business-related concept associated with private sector management prior to its adoption by public school leadership and management practitioners (Conley, 1992; D'Amico, 1988; Verstegen & Wagoner, 1989). Within the public school setting,

Table 1

Parent Survey - District Summary

Question	How are we doing now?	
	1996[a]	1997[b]
To what extent do you think that Southcoast offers a relevant and challenging curriculum? [c]	3.69 -1.13	3.74 -1.08
To what extent are you satisfied with your school's standards for academic performance?	3.63 -1.14	3.72 -1.06
To what extent do you have an opportunity for a voice in school decisions	3.06 -1.01	3.17 -0.92
To what extent do you think finances are handled effectively at the school?	3.61 -0.98	3.62 -0.94
To what extent do you think finances are handled effectively at the district?	3.27 -1.35	3.27 -1.30

Note. [a] In 1996 4,010 surveys were received by the district from parents, a return rate of 25.94 percent.
[b] In 1997 3,872 were received, a return rate of 19.49 percent.
[c] Response choices were arrayed on a five-point Likert scale. One represented "very little" and five represented "great extent." From *Southcoast District Survey Results 1997*, pp. 98-100.

strategic planning is employed to develop a consistent view of the world throughout the schools of a given district, and to establish a foundation for educational activities related to the strategies (McCune, 1986). Strategic planning assumes the construction of consistent plans at an operational level to achieve successful outcomes (Kaufman, Herman & Watters, 1996). Alignment of district-wide resources and efforts to accomplish a central set of objectives is a significant theme underlying this form of planning.

In June 1995, the Southcoast School District's board of directors adopted a strategic plan. The goals and objectives of the plan were designed to direct staff to establish high standards, focus on student learning, include public involvement in decision-making, provide high quality support systems, and collaborate with community resources. Action planning has been required of each school for three consecutive years. By April 1998 the district maintained a file of 644 action plans developed by schools and district departments. How the district board of directors, administration, faculty, and support staff go about organizing themselves and their resources to fulfill the district's mission has been a subject of public attention, board emphasis, and staff engagement. How staff who are responsible for organizing the education of students—in this case school principals and teachers in planning leadership roles—establish objectives and priorities to achieve improved performance has been of concern to parents and other taxpayers, the central office staff, and the board of directors. One segment of this effort—action planning—was the focus of this research.

Models for conducting strategic planning in both business and nonprofit arenas are offered by authors who describe processes similar in approach (Bryson, 1988; Kaufman, 1992, 1995; Mauriel, 1989; McCune, 1986; Steiner, 1979). They demonstrate that strategic planning in a school district setting is often intended to be an organization-wide activity designed to involve stakeholders in the process of setting district priorities and directions. Bryson (1988) defines strategic planning as "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it" (p. 5). Clarifying the organization's mission and values is generally thought to be an essential part of any strategic planning process, as it focuses the members on their reason for being. Formulating strategies to manage the issues developed in the process is another essential step. Bryson defines a strategy as "a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, actions, decisions, or resource allocations that define what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (p. 59). These two steps also illustrate how planning narrows from a broad mission statement to more focused strategies in preparation for sharper specificity in subsidiary plans.

In order to achieve the results described by the plan's strategies, participants must understand the direction their efforts need to take to align with the organization's goals. "Goals ... represent desired states in relation to specific strategies," writes Bryson (p. 178). Mission, goals, and strategies can be used (in his model) as a vision of success to guide the daily activities of the many organizational players. Steiner (1979) reinforces the expectation of a network of detail-level plans that support the organizational strategies; the construction of detailed plans for action and the methods for determining their achievement. The strategies are not functional without implementing action plans. Kaufman (1992, 1995 [see also Kaufman et al., 1996]) also advises designing tactics to apply resources in a systematic fashion in order to accomplish goals or objectives intended to achieve the larger strategies.

Communicating and implementing this process from the top down in an organization has been referred to as cascading (Wall, Solum & Sobol, 1992). Successfully guiding the organization's members is referred to as alignment, a term applied to the creation of subsidiary plans, whether described as tactical or operational in effect, whether designed to implement all or part of a strategic plan (Judson, 1990; McCune, 1986). For purposes of this research, alignment is defined to mean the approach by which the content of schools' action plans are associated with, or linked to, the strategic plan. Upward and downward alignment label principals' descriptions of approaches to linking their schools' action plans to the strategic plan. The former refers to constructing action plans independent of the district plans, and then justifying school goal and/or activity language as associated with the strategic goals and objectives that fit best. The latter refers to construction of action plans such that the school's goals and activities are intended to be subordinate to, and supportive of, the district plan goals and objectives.

While there is a body of strategic planning research focused on district-level processes and executive managements' perceptions, there is a need to establish clear linkages between strategy and action plans. As well, there exists the need to examine how alignment between strategy and action planning occurs in successfully implemented strategic planning systems. The nature of "vertical alignment," the permeation of strategy throughout organizational levels (Labovitz & Rosansky, 1997), and the process through which district-level strategy implementation produces site-level tactical planning are not well understood.

This research investigated relationships between district-level strategic and site-level tactical planning. The report begins with this introductory chapter by defining the primary research questions, which are supported by subsidiary questions. It then introduces in chapter two a review of two groups of relevant literature that established the foundation for the research. Next, chapter 3 describes the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies employed for this project. Chapter four follows the procedures chapter, and describes the results of the research. Chapter 5 then provides the discussion of, and conclusions warranted by, the data. The fifth chapter is followed by a bibliography of resources accessed for this work, and then a series of appendices containing key district and school data, procedural notes, and protocols.

The Research Question

The central focus of the research described here was to discover how and to what extent school administrators develop school action plan alignment to implement objectives consistent with district-level strategic goals and objectives. Framed in educational policy system terms: do principals plan and act locally to implement global policy strategically envisioned by district policy-makers? Or, do they plan and act locally in response to local needs, and retroactively fit the local plan to a global model? And is there a corresponding difference in the content of their school action plans? The research focused on (a) the nature of action plans that principals construct at schools, (b) on principals' and key teachers' perceptions of the linkage of action plans to the district's strategic plan, (c) on the process used to construct action plans, and (d) on the extent to which the content of school action plans correspond to the content of the district strategic plan, and to the principal's planning approach.

Subsidiary Questions

The specific research questions developed for this project were designed to serve as a framework for personal interviews and to guide document analysis. The questions address principals' perceptions of district strategic intent, principals' planning actions in light of those perceptions, and measurement of the planning product over time. The chief and subsidiary study questions answered as a result of this research are as follows:

I. What is the nature of the action planning principals conduct at the school?

  A. How do principals develop action plans?

  B. Why do principals use the planning method they describe?

  C. In what ways are the characteristics of action planning as described by principals and key teachers comparable to a selected model described in relevant strategic planning literature?

  D. In what sense do principals perceive school action plan goals and activities to be related to district strategic goals and objectives?

  E. How do principals characterize the alignment of school action plan goals to district strategic goals and objectives?

  F. How do key teachers involved in the planning process describe the development and alignment of school goals to district goals and objectives?

II. To what extent do action plan goals and activities align with the goals and objectives contained within the strategic plan?

  A. Is there a positive correlation between school sites' action plan goals and activities, and the strategic plan goals and objectives?

B. Are there significant differences between the action plan goals and activities created by principals who describe an upward versus a downward approach to action plan alignment?

Description of Terms

The following terms were used for purposes of the research. As a result of preliminary interviews with central office administrators, school principals, and teachers, it became clear that not all of the staff used the same labels to identify the concepts described here. Where there are variations from these terms and the concepts they are taken to represent by district staff, explanation is included.

Strategic plan: The *Southcoast School District Strategic Plan, 1995-2000* (Southcoast School District, 1995) is (a) a district-wide plan (b) adopted by the board of directors (c) that contains a mission statement and (d) identifies policy of paramount importance to the board. In addition to the mission statement, there are twenty-nine statements contained in the strategic plan comprising (e) goals and (f) objectives designed to guide the entire district.

Strategic plan goal: A strategic plan goal is (a) a brief statement of purpose intended by the board of directors to guide (b) action planning, (c) resource allocation, and (d) site activities. Southcoast's strategic plan contains five goals.

Strategic plan objective: A strategic plan objective is (a) a brief statement of purpose that is generally (b) lengthier and (c) more specific than its superordinate goal statement. The Southcoast strategic plan contains twenty-four objectives. Each objective statement (d) is subordinate to one of the five goal statements.

Action plan: An action plan is a set of (a) goals and (b) activities—one or more in number—established by (c) a school district site. Each page of an action plan could contain a site goal, list activities for the year, identify responsible persons, identify activity due dates, describe performance standards, identify required resources, note the status of activities, and contain other identifying information. A site may be a school, a business or other support services office, or an administrative office.

Site goal: A site goal is a specific statement of purpose for school or department staff to achieve during the year. Each page of an action plan contains one site goal.

Site activity: Activities for the current planning year describe tasks that are designed to accomplish the site goal listed on the same page of the action plan. Activities are identified by site personnel. By form design, activities are subordinate to site goals.

Planning product: The product of planning is distinguished here from the results of plans. That is to say, the outcomes of the planning process comprise a product called a plan. For purposes of this research, plans are the product of the planning process.

Planning outcome: By comparison to the planning product, the outcomes of implementing plans are defined to be the results of the plan. This study did not attempt to measure the results plans attain in terms of educational outcomes.

Performance standard: A performance standard is a description of the expected degree or level of requirement, excellence, or attainment with respect to the activity with which it is associated. Each activity box on an action plan form has a performance standard box associated with that activity. (Activity and performance standard statements are entered into their respective boxes on Southcoast's action plan form.)

Alignment: Alignment refers broadly to the successful guidance of the members throughout the organization. It is a term narrowly applied to (a) the creation of subsidiary plans, whether described as tactical or operational in effect, (b) the design and implementation of all or part of a strategic plan, and (c) the formation of an integrated approach by organizational subunits. In this study it specifically means the extent to which the sites' action plan goals and activities are associated with the strategic plan.

Alignment, Downward: Upward and downward alignment label principals' descriptions of approaches to linking action plans to the strategic plan. Downward alignment refers to constructing action plans in such a fashion that the site's goals and activities are intended to be subordinate to, and supportive of, the district strategic plan goals and objectives.

Alignment, Upward: Upward alignment refers to constructing action plans independent of the district plans, and then adjusting, revising, or situating site goal and/or activity language so as to associate the action plan goals to the strategic goals and objectives that best fit the desired action plan goals and activities.

Site council: A site council is the superordinate leadership or management committee at a school site, and site councils "typically represent some combination of parents, administrators, and staff" (Elmore, 1993, p. 44). A council also may include students and non-parent community members. Also, a council is responsible for making or recommending to the principal key school decisions. It may be known by other labels, such as school council, or team leaders, if it exists in any form at a school.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT RESEARCH AND THEORY

Overview

This chapter establishes the theoretical and research landscape within which this study was situated. The research problem, an investigation of school action planning and action plans within the context of a district strategic plan, was formulated following searches of existing strategic planning literature and a preliminary investigation in the participating school district.

The literature on strategic planning is quite extensive. To address the field, the first task was to establish briefly the place of planning in schools. The second task of the review was to frame the field, and narrow the review to relevant works applicable to, and then situated in, education. The literature was organized to initially provide an overview of documented strategic planning approaches, and follow with an analysis of these approaches for educational applications. The first half of the review concludes with selection of one particular strategic planning model representative of a common approach in education—a model appropriate to educational analysis. In addition, two alternate models are identified for comparative purposes. The review then narrows further to focus briefly on an element of the model—action planning.

Subsequently this chapter shifts from the model to describe specific research in education: first, studies that define and compare strategic planning; second, studies that analyze perceptions about strategic planning; third, research that emphasizes the action planning component of strategic planning; and fourth, studies that address related issues of planning and school culture and outcomes. A summary and analysis section further distills the literature to identify through selected citations how this research is similar to established work, and extends into an aspect not yet addressed by previous studies.

School Needs and a Planful Attack

Schools in the United States have been under increasing pressure to demonstrate both more effective means of improving student learning, and more efficient methods of achieving that end. As organizations, schools have been struggling to cope with the changes they need to implement to respond to societal pressures, both politically and financially. Guthrie (1998) reports "analysts claim that the loosely coupled manner in which public education's operating arm is connected with the governance systems renders schools remarkably resistant to any fundamental change shaped by the formal authority of the political system" (p. 89). As a result, state legislators, governors, and school boards may desire that change occurs in a particular direction, but those who comprise the system of schools may disdain unfamiliar paths.

In a similar vein, Clark and Toenjes (1998) reported that recent studies indicate "that school finance and governance mechanisms in large school districts are weakly linked to effective operations of modern schools" (p. 113). Similarly, Guthrie (1998) asserted that "America's public education system has evolved governance and finance arrangements which are inappropriately or inadequately aligned with arenas of action. In effect, when it comes to the nation's public schools, power is poorly positioned to produce performance" (p. 90). School districts are being called upon to arrest the downward trend in student performance, and the equally troubling and simultaneous upward trend in per pupil costs, through more effective organizational planning and operation. According to Bozeman and Schmelzer (1984), there has been

> . . . a growing concern that education continues to lag behind business and industry in the areas of planning—particularly strategic or long-range planning. This concern resides in the midst of evidence that effective planning can contribute significantly to the productivity, climate, and efficiency of an organization. (p. 35)

Strategic planning is a form of planning that school districts—in increasing numbers across the country—are turning to in order to develop a plan of attack to implement solutions to these effectiveness and efficiency problems (Conley, 1992, 1993).

Strategic Planning Approaches

Before introduction to the components of a particular form of strategic plan, and a strategic planning process, it is beneficial to understand the major approaches to such planning and how they may apply to education. Various approaches share common features, and some are so unique or specialized as to be unsuitable for educational use. Bryson and Roering (1987) advanced a serviceable scheme for classifying strategic planning approaches, and it is used here to provide a similar structure for this section of the literature review. Much of this section closely parallels their work. An alternative method, proposed by Bozeman and Schmelzer (1984), divides the approaches into categories labeled systems approach, resource dependent approach, planning and design approach, contingency theory, planning by generation, and the conventional planning approach. The Bryson and Roering model (1987) was more suited to this analysis due to recency and comprehensiveness. Bryson and Roering cluster strategic planning into nine categories, each of which is summarized below. References to later authors are added to Bryson and Roering's established categories based upon similarity of approaches. A much more detailed recounting of the models may be found in Bryson (1988).

Harvard Policy Model. The Harvard model is associated with Andrews (1980, 1987) and Christensen, Andrews, Bower, Hammermesh, and Porter (1983). Key features include focusing on the strategic business unit, finding the best strategic fit between the firm and its environment, and considering values and obligations of management within society. The Harvard model is credited with contributing SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis to the field. SWOT analysis is applicable to educational models, has been in use since the 1920s, and served as the point of departure for public sector strategic planning (Wechsler, 1989).

The Harvard Policy Model appears to be the forerunner of most strategic planning models used in government planning. Elements of it are found in various models offered for use in education (see, for example, Bryson, 1988). The model's SWOT analysis was modified by Cope (1987, 1989) for use in both higher education and other public organizations. This version resulted from a preference to focus on the strengths and opportunities aspect of the structure, and to discount the weaknesses and threats.

The model might be usefully applied to education if a business unit—possibly the school—were appropriately identified. The Harvard model is not as useful as other models for this research because of its emphasis on the strategic business unit, which has not been identified in the school district setting—possibly because the business unit aspect of the model does not yet enjoy acceptance in the public school setting.

Strategic Planning Systems. The strategic planning systems model is associated with Lorange (1980) and Lorange, Morton, and Ghoshal (1986). The work of Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer (1993), Kaufman (1992), Keller (1991), and Steiner (1979) offer systems models for the private sector. Key components are systems for arriving at plans and decisions, resource and control allocations within planning frameworks, and an intent to address all possible areas of key decision-making. This approach incorporates SWOT analysis from the Harvard model, and may be simplified for public education.

Full-blown systems implementation is considerably complex, and potentially rigid. It is likely this is the most used approach in education due to its heavy process orientation, meaning it involves a large number of stakeholders to develop and distill strategic objectives. Bryson (1988, 1993), Cook (1988), Kaufman (1995), Kaufman, Herman, and Watters (1996), and McCune (1986) have written significant works on strategic planning for education, focusing their writing specifically on school districts.

Cook and McCune have been credited with much of the infusion of strategic planning into the country's public school systems (Conley, 1992). It is the strategic planning systems approach that provides the model most suitable for this research because of (a) the flexibility of the model from simple to complex applications, (b) the inclusion of a wide variety of stakeholders, and (c) the ubiquitous nature of the training sessions conducted for school districts across the country by Cook and McCune beginning in the mid-1980s (Conley, 1992, p. 2). The systems approach was referenced in doctoral research found in the latter half of this chapter.

Strategic planning systems provide useful tools for developing plans and decision criteria for the public setting. Complex planning frameworks are not as useful in public settings, where resources are more likely to be invested in organizational priorities other than the planning process. Because of the intent of such strategic planning systems to address all possible areas of key decision-making, they can be perceived as too complex and cumbersome. However, incorporating SWOT analysis into the systems approach improves its value in public education planning, where acknowledging various stakeholders in the organization's environment is a priority. In addition, the systems approach works well in an organization where process is valued.

Stakeholder Management. The stakeholder model is associated with Freeman (1984) and Gilbert, Hartman, Freeman, and Mauriel (1988). The stakeholder approach also fits well with education. It emphasizes identifying key stakeholders, clarifying their criteria for judging organizational success, and constructing strategies to address the stakeholders' demands—essential to the public school setting. "Implicit within the stakeholder management approach is a process of competition, negotiation, and accommodation through which the organization attempts to achieve its interests while satisfying (balancing) the demands of competing stakeholders" (Wechsler, 1989, p. 366).

It can be used with other approaches, and likely should as it tends to de-emphasize the mission of the organization over political concerns. Various strategic planning systems approaches include stakeholder concepts, blurring the distinction between stakeholder management models and strategic planning systems models. The stakeholder analysis and balancing process is comparable to the SWOT component of the Harvard Policy Model. However, it does not necessarily address the needs of the largest body of internal customers within the school setting, the students, for whom the product of the organization—knowledge work—is created (Schlechty, 1990, 1997; Sizer, 1985). Mauriel's (1989) later work, developed specifically for school districts, is systematic in nature and includes a large component of stakeholder analysis as well as an instructional systems planning component. It is not a research-based publication.

Strategic Issues Management. This model is associated with Ansoff (1980), King (1982), and Pflaum and Delmont (1987). Key points of this approach are resolution of strategic (meaning critical in this instance) issues and its dynamic nature compared to static approaches of other models. Again, SWOT analysis, from the Harvard model, is easily combined with this model. It is unlikely to be particularly useful in public education at this time, as it demands continual use by a group attending to strategic issues. Bryson and Roering (1987) indicated it does not appear to be as well developed as other models and may not be worth the effort for an organization that is not situated in a rapidly evolving marketplace. Until recently, rapidly evolving markets have not been the case for public education. However, this aspect of the public schools' environments may be changing, making the model more attractive to schools (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1994; Doyle, 1994; Hill, 1994; Schlechty, 1990, 1997).

Strategic Negotiations. The strategic negotiations model is associated with Pettigrew (1982) and Fisher and Ury (1981, 1991), and grew out of Allison's (1971) work on the Cuban missile crisis. It has roots in bargaining and gaming strategy, and may combine well with the strategic issues management model. Once again, it is useful where a skilled group is able to use the model routinely as strategic issues demand resolution. It may be, in fact, that both strategic issues management and strategic negotiations models are in use at the executive levels of public school districts regardless of intentionality. No research was found that addressed this conjecture.

Logical Incrementalism. Logical incrementalism as a model is associated with Quinn (1980) and Lindblom (1959). This approach blends portions of other models and features a focus on small changes that comprise overall organizational strategy. It may be argued not to be strategic at all, as it may ignore major themes for small issues. The complexity of the rationale underlying this model may render it of limited use for public education organizations. Models offered by Cook (1988), McCune (1986), and others and used widely by public school districts employ the process-oriented strategic planning systems models. The logical incrementalism model favors a perpetual approach that likely deprives stakeholders of the intuitive sense of closure obtained from completing a planning cycle and producing a publicly adopted plan.

Framework for Innovation. The model is associated with Taylor (1984) and Pinchot (1985). The framework for innovation approach is intended to foster experimentation and change within the organization. It is an entrepreneurial model that condones failure as a cost of advancement. The innovation approach does not seem suited for school districts, described as "loosely coupled" organizations (Weick, 1976), as the approach counts on central control coupled with entrepreneurial culture. No research was found describing the implemention of the framework for innovation approach within public school districts.

Strategic issues management, strategic negotiations, logical incrementalism, and the framework for innovation approaches all contain components of planning systems that are useful within public education. Like the content methods (the next two), they are not yet practical to the degree the process approaches have been. Elements of the strategic issues management model are found within selected systems approaches when there is an emphasis on continuous environmental scanning and adjustment of plans according to analysis of results. Again, it is unlikely that, beyond the superintendent and district executives, most school districts can support planning personnel to formally maintain strategic issues lists and responses.

Strategic negotiations and logical incrementalism as methodologies haven't found their way into public education literature to any noticeable degree; as well, planning programs related to their underlying theories don't seem to have found their way into school districts. However, staff development programs based on Fischer, Ury, and Patton's (1991) and Ury's (1993) works and the Harvard Negotiation Project have been implemented to improve communication and interpersonal relations skills.

Portfolio Methods. This model is associated with Henderson (1979), Wind and Mahajian (1981), and MacMillan (1983). The method is commonly referred to as the Boston Consulting Group model, and is believed to be widely studied and used in business. The portfolio approach integrates the concepts of business cycles, learning curves, and profitability, and therefore does not fit well with public education as it is currently conceived: "the economic criteria that underlie most portfolio models are clearly inappropriate for public sector organizations" (Wechsler, 1989, p. 366).

Portfolio methods, and competitive analysis methods, as noted below, tend not to be widely used in public settings and are less used in public schools. Montanari and Bracker (1986) developed an application of the portfolio model for public sector planning, substituting funding attractiveness and ability to serve for the Boston Consulting Group model's market growth rate and market share factors, respectively. The public sector applications of the model reviewed in Montanari, Daneke, and Bracker (1989) demonstrate success in non-profit and municipal settings, but leave public education untried. No research was located that documents the implementation of portfolio methodology in public schools. Revising this model offers potential application to schools, whose various programs can be conceptualized as public services or products. Testing the application would seem valuable given the increasingly competitive nature of education and the growing public reluctance to increase operating investments in education.

Competitive Analysis. The competitive analysis model is associated with Porter (1980, 1985) and Harrigan (1981). This approach focuses on the features of a company's industry, competitors, suppliers, and costs to arrive at one of three basic strategies: (a) overall cost leadership, meaning maintaining a position as the low-cost competitor; (b) differentiation, which is offerings the market accepts as uniquely different from the competitors'; and (c) focus, the narrowing of a product line to address a segment of the market for the products (Porter, 1980, p. 35).

Competitive analysis does not seem to have a following in public education at this time, as competitive forces are not currently part of the range of considerations included in school districts' environmental scans. Bryson and Roering (1987) attribute this to the model's dependence upon an industry context, and the difficulty with defining an industry for a monopolistic public entity such as a public school system.

> The strength of competitive analysis is that it provides a systematic way of assessing industries and the strategic options facing strategic business units within those industries. For public-sector applications, the weaknesses of competitive analysis are that (1) it is often difficult to know what the "industry" is and what forces affect it and (2) the key to organizational success in the public sector is often collaboration instead of competition. (p. 18)

However, its main components—relative power of customers, relative power of suppliers, threat of substitute products, threat of new entrants, and amount of rivalrous activity within the industry—do seem to have parallels in public education. As with the strategic issues management and portfolio methods models, this is likely to change, and could certainly change with the advent of charter schools, contract schools, and vouchers (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1994; Hill, 1994).

In particular, proponents of these substitute products argue that introduction of market forces will stimulate improvement in public education. In this event, the model would be far more applicable at the school level, which appears to best approximate the strategic business unit upon which both the competitive analysis and portfolio model approaches rely. For now, though, the systems and stakeholder approaches better approximate the existing cultures and contexts in which public education exists, and existing research in the field identifies these approaches as commonly used by school districts (Conley, 1992; Vincent, 1992).

Summarizing the Field

These nine approaches to strategic planning emanated from the private sector. They are rational planning methods that have implied the ability to gather environmental and organizational data, organize options within a preset schema, and elect a course (or courses) of action based on expectations of the future. The underlying purpose of strategic planning in the private sector has been the improvement of stockholder value. Business strategies have been suited for a competitive environment where measures of success are different from those used in the public sector. Although private sector measures used by the capital marketplace tend to be clearer and quantifiable, unlike most of those in the public sector, Bryson (1988) argued that most strategic planning methods have in some fashion been adaptable to the public sector (although schools have not been frequently mentioned).

Bryson and Roering (1987) classified the first four of the approaches identified above (Harvard Policy Model, Strategic Planning Systems, Stakeholder Management, Strategic Issues Management) as process-oriented approaches. They focused on the method of gathering data and structured a mechanism for generating choices for future action. The next three approaches (Strategic Negotiations, Logical Incrementalism, Framework for Innovation) were classified as process strategies rather than process approaches. They do not represent whole systems approaches at the same level as the other approaches, but rather key strategies that may better perform as subsidiary elements of the process or content approaches.

The last two approaches (Portfolio Methods, Competitive Analysis) are content approaches, which differ markedly from the process approaches in that they are methods to determine choices based upon the inputs. These stand in contrast to the process models that use inputs to generate a range of choices (a matter of identifying a choice, rather than producing choices, respectively). Indeed, the last two approaches "are antithetical to process when process concerns get in the way of developing the 'right' answer" (p. 17). The content approaches are, again, very product-, industry-, and competition-oriented, depending heavily on economic models for validity and applicability.

In summary, major contributors to both the private and public sector models for strategic planning were identified in this section; they were clustered for analysis using an established structure consistent with existing literature and strategic planning authorities; and their key components, strengths, weaknesses, and suitability for public settings (in which some authors explicitly include public schools) were briefly compared.

The review of strategic planning literature demonstrated it was largely prescriptive in nature; it provided directions and rationale for implementing a particular planning approach. This resulted in limited usefulness where knowledge about actual results of strategic planning model implementation was desired. The literature sources did, however, provide background for investigating a strategic planning system, the nature of alignment expected to occur within, and offered similar conceptual planning models.

Selecting a Model

The general thrusts of planning processes—models for conducting strategic planning activities in both the business and nonprofit arenas—offered by several authors were relatively similar in overall approach (Bryson, 1988; Kaufman, 1992, 1995; Mauriel, 1989; McCune, 1986; Steiner, 1979). Elements of three leading authorities' planning models (Bryson, 1988; Kaufman, 1992, 1995; Steiner, 1979), from slightly different periods in the evolution of the art, introduced strategic planning systems components useful in conducting the proposed research. One example of an earlier effort to distill, to the bare essentials, the strategic planning models used in school districts produced a five-stage configuration that included organizational purpose, needs assessment, action plan, implementation, and evaluation (Freericks, 1991). Essential elements of strategic planning distilled from the works reviewed for this study more descriptively include (a) a plan to plan, (b) the environmental scan, (c) SWOT analysis, (d) vision, mission, and values clarification, (e) strategy development, (f) tactical planning, (g) implementation, and (h) evaluation of results. Considerable variety exists in the approaches proffered by strategic planning authorities.

Bryson (1988) defined strategic planning as "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it" (p. 5). Clarifying the organization's mission and values early in the process was generally thought to be an essential part of any strategic planning process. Formulating strategies to manage the issues developed in the process was another essential step. These two steps illustrated that planning should narrow from a broad mission statement to more focused strategies in preparation for sharper specificity in subsidiary plans.

Given clarity in mission and values, participants must then understand the direction their efforts need to take to align with the organization's. Then mission, goals, and strategies can be used as a vision of success to guide the daily activities of the many organizational players. The method of communicating and implementing this process from the top down in an organization has been referred to as cascading (Wall, Solum & Sobol, 1992). Successfully guiding the players throughout the organization was referred to as alignment, a term applied to the creation of subsidiary plans, whether described as tactical or operational in effect, designed to implement all or part of a strategic plan (Judson, 1990; McCune, 1986).

As noted earlier in the definitions, for purposes of this research, alignment means the extent to which an entity within an organization, in this instance schools, develops action plans associated with, or linked to, the strategic plan. Downward and upward alignment label principals' descriptions of approaches to linking school action plans to the strategic plan. The former refers to constructing action plans in such a fashion that the school's goals and activities are intended to be subordinate to and supportive of the district plan goals and objectives; the latter to constructing action plans independent of the district plans and then adjusting or revising site goal and/or activity language so as to associate the action plan goals with the strategic goals and objectives that fit best.

Steiner's (1979) approach also addressed the establishment of organizational aims and strategies, as well as the construction of detailed plans for action and the methods for determining their achievement. Steiner defined strategic planning from the perspective of future results of current decision, process, philosophy, and structure, which is somewhat different from Bryson's (1988) model. He reinforced the expectation of a network of detail-level plans that support the organizational strategies. The strategies are not functional without implementing action plans.

Following Steiner and Bryson, Kaufman (1992, 1995 [see also Kaufman et al., 1996]) offered a complex model that advised designing tactics to apply resources in a systematic fashion so as to accomplish goals or objectives designed to achieve the larger strategies. Kaufman et al (1996) described contrasting approaches to strategic planning: "rolling up" and "rolling down" (p. 34-35). Rolling up names a process whereby an entire educational system is built from the ground upward, from class to course to department to school to district. Staff at the levels closest to students begin the plan assembly process, and the plans from the various sites are knit together to form an overall district strategic plan. "In this sequential fashion, the whole array of individual strategic plans are 'rolled up' together to construct the would-be total educational strategic plan" (p. 35). Kaufman et al were critical of the rolling up approach, stating that it was unlikely to deliver a positive return on the fiscal contribution to the system (p. 37).

Rolling down is the antithesis in which the needs of constituents are determined before a plan is built to prescribe the necessary steps along the way to achieving objectives that meet needs. Rolling down begins with defining the nature of the schools' environment and what overall outcome should be achieved, "and then derives—moving (or rolling) downward—defining what each part of the educational establishment must contribute to the whole, as well as the ways each part of the system must cooperate and mutually contribute to the collective educational mission" (p. 35). Educational systems may also combine both approaches for a meet-in-the-middle result. See Table 2 for a point-by-point, side-by-side comparison of rolling up and rolling down.

Kaufman et al's distinguishing of these two approaches provided a reference point for the downward and upward alignment approaches in principals' implementation styles examined in this research. Common elements of the models may be used to examine school action planning, and to investigate how in practice such detailed planning is related to district-level strategic planning. The literature on planning models established an expectation that such elements would be found in an organization that plans strategically. It also provided examples of ways that school and central office staff might link strategies to detailed plans. Further, the literature asserted that insufficient action planning was one reason strategies fail (Judson, 1990), reinforcing an expectation that

Table 2

Critical Attributes of Plan Development Approach

Rolling Up	Rolling Down
• move from inside-out	• move from outside-in
• build from lower levels	• define external environment
• progress upward to organizational mission	• progress downward from organizational mission
• start with subject matter learning objectives	• start with defining human condition to be achieved
• sequential progression from level, building plans to district plan	• define contributions of parts of the educational system after mission clear
• reactive process	• proactive process
• seeks only efficiency	• freedom from "how we always do business"
• constrained by existing philosophy, politics, materials, approaches, content, and methods	• opportunity to create a modified or new organization, courses, methods of instruction, location, and content
• assumes resulting structure will be safe and usable	• designs structure around specified purpose
• internal consistency	• externally oriented

Note. Adapted from *Educational Planning: Strategic, Tactical and Operational* (pp. 34-37), R. Kaufman, J. Herman, and K. Watters, 1996, Lancaster, PA: Technomic. Copyright 1996 by Technomic Publishing Company, Inc.

districts would attend to this aspect of planning. Finally, the literature indicated the alignment should involve both subsidiary planning system components as well as resources (Goodstein, Nolan & Pfeiffer, 1993; Steiner, 1979).

Given its clarity and use as a reference point within the field, the Steiner (1979) model provides a useful conceptual base for guiding the proposed research. The Kaufman (1995) and Mauriel (1989) models provide education-specific alternatives for comparison. Next, this literature review turns to research on the implementation of strategic planning in education.

Research in Education

A number of researchers have written on the topic of strategic planning in school districts since early literature on the topic appeared in approximately the mid-1980s, denoted by the works of McCune (1986) and Cook (1988). Twenty-six useful dissertations focused on some aspect of strategic planning in one or more school districts were located, 17 of which addressed: (a) defining or comparing strategic planning models; (b) perceptions of participants or observers of strategic planning processes; (c) analysis of action planning and perceptions surrounding that aspect of a strategic planning system; (d) analysis of culture and perceptions, or educational results of strategic planning; or a combination of these four areas. Two of the 17 dissertations focused on the effect of culture in successful planning, and the oldest dissertation focused on the educational results associated with strategic planning. Table 3 categorizes the 17 dissertations using these similarities. Each category is addressed below in turn, and described through a summary of the salient elements of the relevant dissertations. The nine remaining dissertations (Cusack, 1996; Grab, 1993; Hennon, 1994; Jaconette, 1995; Link, 1995; McCormick, 1990; McNeight, 1980; Reichrath, 1990; Scott, 1992) addressed aspects of strategic planning that, while informative, were not germain to the action planning component of the strategic planning process. As a result, they are not described here.

Table 3

Categories of Dissertations on Strategic Planning in Education

	Category			
Author and Date of Dissertation	Defining and Comparing	Analyzing Perceptions	Action Planning	Analyzing Culture or Results
Allmon (1996)		X		
Baldwin (1994)				X
Basham (1988)				X
Bingham (1996)		X	X	
Freericks (1991)	X			
Gehrking (1996)		X	X	
Heller (1997)		X		
Hippert (1997)	X	X		
Hoffman (1996)		X	X	
Kopecky (1996)				X
Livesey (1990)	X			
Lodes (1995)		X		
Nessmith (1992)			X	
Ray (1996)		X		
Vincent (1992)			X	
Williams (1992)	X	X		
Wotring (1995)		X	X	

Note. From *Dissertation Abstracts International*

Defining and Comparing. Livesey (1990) completed a study to describe and compare strategic planning practices among selected California public school districts. In

80 percent of the 30 districts, the superintendents were the visionaries and plan leaders. District plans to plan generally included all major strategic planning process elements. However, as defined in Livesey's study, only 50 percent of the districts used the elements to a great extent in planning. Livesey found that district long-term plans most commonly covered a three- to five-year time span. One of his conclusions was that public school districts are more successful and secure with short- to intermediate-term strategies and objectives rather than long-term strategies. Livesey's study was one of the earlier works to describe and compare practices, and provided a reference point for differentiating between long-term strategic and short-term tactical elements of a district strategic plan. Livesey established for this study a distinction between district-level strategies and school-level action plans.

Freericks (1991) conducted in Maricopa County, Arizona public schools a multipurpose study similar to Livesey's (1990). Three of Freericks' four objectives were to (a) identify strategic planning models and their common components in the related literature; (b) to conduct case studies of selected public school districts to identify and analyze strategic planning models being used by practitioners; and (c) to identify similarities and differences among strategic planning models and factors (district size, type, urban vs. suburban setting, and number of years engaging in strategic planning) contributing to these similarities and differences.

Freericks' research assisted in framing this study through identifying five common stages defined in literature, including, in particular, building an action plan. She found similarities and differences among models with respect to the forms of terminology used, the classifications of persons involved in the development of action plans, and the components of action plans. Freericks concluded there was no indication that the four factors earlier noted parenthetically contributed to the similarities and differences found among models. Freericks' work conceptualized action planning more broadly than does the definition contained in this work. Freericks did not examine how the action planning was conducted, nor analyze the direction of implementation as did this study.

Williams (1992) conducted a cross-sectional study designed to produce descriptive data concerning the extent to which strategic planning practices are utilized by key building-level personnel. Williams defined key personnel as administrators and teachers who occupy leadership positions. The key questions constructed by Williams to guide his study included: (a) What are the predominant planning practices used by Durham County Schools? (b) How do building-level key personnel feel about their involvement in the planning process? and (c) How do planning practices used by Durham County Schools compare with the generic components of strategic planning?

Williams' data indicated that a significant number of strategic planning practices were indeed utilized in Durham County Schools. Included within the predefined set of practices was action plan formulation. Williams concluded that the effectiveness of Durham County Schools' planning strategy may increase if key personnel utilized more proactive and global planning practices such as contingency planning and environmental scanning. Williams' study was significant to the present research because it again confirmed the location and importance of action planning within the strategic planning process. However, Williams' research, like Livesey's (1990) and Freericks' (1991) did not, in the process of defining and comparing planning components, examine relationships among action planning approaches, action plan contents, and strategies developed at the district-level.

In a 1992 study, Vincent described the implementation of the strategic planning process used by the Des Moines (Iowa) Public Schools. Having designed the study to establish a refined picture of discrete components of a strategic planning process, Vincent found that standard planning components included a mission statement to narrow the focus of the organization, and accompanying goals, objectives, and action plans to achieve desired results.

Vincent's findings included descriptions of pre-planning events, processes, district-wide goal development, and the major outcomes of the district's strategic planning process. This three-year research project was based on a naturalistic orientation. He inductively gathered data to discover, in lieu of attempting to verify, hypotheses. His research techniques included participant observations, interviews, and document analysis. Vincent's study provided an example of a multi-year, qualitative methodology utilizing triangulation techniques, and its description of action planning assisted in framing the research described here. Vincent's study did not, however, concentrate on the intricacies of action plan relationships to strategic objectives, nor the distinctive approaches taken by principals in the action plan development process as does the research reported here.

Analyzing Perceptions. In a 1995 study, Wotring examined the perceptions of students, community members, teachers, administrators, and classified employees (N = 88) involved in a year-long strategic plan development process for the Belpre City School District, Belpre, Ohio. Wotring's purpose in conducting the study was to determine how participants perceived the activities and product of the strategic planning process. He used a chi-square test of independence to determine if relationships could be found between the participants' perceptions toward the strategic plan and their position role, or between the participants' perceptions and their role in participating in the planning project.

Wotring indicated that there was strong acceptance of the strategic plan's basic components and action strategies which outlined the future directions of the school district. He also found, though, a less positive view of the district's abilities to implement the objectives and strategies of the plan by 1998, which was the year identified for plan completion. His respondents indicated they didn't think that the intended accomplishments would be achieved three years hence. Wotring also concluded that the participants most involved in the strategic planning process displayed the most positive perceptions in their responses to the survey.

Wotring's research was significant to this study with respect to his deliniation of basic plan components and action strategies, and the nature of involvement effects on participants. His results underscored the importance of focusing the research efforts described in this study on key participants who were identified as, and perceived themselves to be, involved in the process, as compared to an entire school staff or members of the community who at best may be marginally aware of the school-level planning. Wotring's work did not focus upon the action planning process as was done in this research. His work also did not distinguish between varying approaches to action planning as a component of the overall strategic plan, and the potential differences resulting therefrom, which was a chief concern of the research reported here.

Results somewhat contradictory to Wotring's were described in Allmon's (1996) research into the perceived impact of strategic planning mandated for Pennsylvania public schools. Allmon surveyed professional staff and school directors ($\underline{N} = 197$) who served on district strategic planning committees. Allmon reported results indicating planning participants generally had positive perceptions toward the process, product, and impact associated with strategic planning. However, she could find no evidence that respondents' position or planning role influenced their overall perceptions of strategic planning. Allmon's work focused upon educators and school directors who served on district planning committees. Although she did search for differences in perceptions among the respondents as action planning team members, her research did not descend to the school level as in this research design.

Gehrking (1996) sought to examine areas of agreement and disagreement among school district superintendents ($\underline{N} = 246$) relating to strategic planning practices and effectiveness. Strategic planning practices examined by Gehrking included mission statement development, operating plan development, and budget development; stakeholder involvement, and planning logistics. Gehrking administered a nine-item questionnaire addressing 19 strategic planning practices, and including a five-part question focusing on strategic planning effectiveness. He found significant differences on a number of factors between superintendents of school districts with large student populations versus those responsible for small student enrollment. In particular, superintendents differed in their assessments of the effectiveness of strategic planning for improving management effectiveness. Gehrking's research was important to this study because his survey instrument demonstrated success at distinguishing among parts of a strategic plan, especially the operating plan component. The instrument was useful in refining the interview protocols contained in Appendices A, B, and C. Because it targeted superintendents exclusively, Gehrking's research fell short of addressing the questions developed for this research, which aimed far lower in the district hierarchy.

For Hoffman's (1996) study, the problem was to identify and analyze key factors which influenced strategic planning processes. Hoffman conducted research in three Iowa education agencies using an interview process. Among his findings was a need for planning structures which incorporated continuity between initial planning and implementation. Hoffman listed seven conclusions from his research, and the most critical finding for purposes of this study was that "action planning and implementation received short shrift in the strategic planning process" (p. i). Among Hoffman's four major recommendations was that additional research measure the success of strategic planning. Hoffman's research methodology and conclusions provided for this study a naturalistic approach and motivation to examine action planning in the larger context of the overall district strategic plan. An argument suggested by Hoffman's conclusions and recommendations was that measurement of action planning and implementation are points at which the success of strategic planning could be measured.

Heller's (1997) purpose for conducting a study of strategic planning was to examine its use and impact as perceived by Nebraska school superintendents (N = 287). Two of Heller's eight findings and his methodological approach were of interest for this research project. First, he found that a significant relationship existed between the degree of implementation and the length of time the process had been used; where strategic planning had been in place for a longer period of time, there was a greater level of implementation in districts. Second, Heller found "a significant relationship existed between the perceived effectiveness of strategic planning and both the degree [i.e., extent] of implementation and the length of time a district had used strategic planning. Strategic planning was perceived as more effective in districts that had been involved in the process for a longer period of time" (p. i).

These findings indicated that a greater level of acceptance of strategic planning should be expected in a district with a long history of use, making the Southcoast School District a fertile candidate for study. The district was in its third year of the current plan, and the prior superintendent introduced strategic planning another three years earlier. Heller's study provided an example of a project combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to research selected aspects of strategic planning. Heller's study also provided another example of research focused on the executive level of district management—a level not directly involved in plan implementation at the school. It certainly added another piece to the larger puzzle of school district strategic planning, particularly with respect to variables associated with differences in perceptions. The research did not, however, address the school implementation nor variables associated with different approaches to, or products of, the action planning component of the systems approach, the target of this research.

Hippert (1997) conducted a study quite similar to Heller's (1997) to examine the perceptions of school district superintendents (N = 134) about the value of the strategic planning process in Pennsylvania. Hippert also sought to determine the superintendents' perceptions about the ability of strategic planning to impact schools in her state. Results of the study indicated that superintendents were highly satisfied with the strategic planning process regardless of the size or financial status of their districts. Further, the superintendents perceived the strategic planning process as impacting parent and community involvement, curriculum, assessment and staff development. However, Hippert suggested further research to identify actual results of, rather than perceptions about, the strategic planning process, as her study did not address concrete planning outcomes. The Hippert study, similar to the Hoffman (1996) work, suggested value in assessing outcomes of the strategic planning process rather than limiting analysis to perceptions of outcomes. These two studies were testimony to the limited reach of existing research regarding planning products and outcomes. They left a broad expanse of territory to further study the planning products, which this research explored.

Lodes (1995) studied the perceptions of school superintendents (N = 293) regarding the strategic planning process and its impact on the quality of planning practices used in Wisconsin school districts. Lodes' purpose was to determine whether school district demographics (district enrollment size, location, type), as well as process factors (extent of strategic planning process use, extent of stakeholder involvement, and superintendents' expressed view of the role of strategic planning) influenced district leadership perceptions. He used chi-square analysis to determine if the differences in opinions were significant, based upon his identified factors.

While Lodes found statistically significant differences in superintendents' perceptions with respect to a variety of factors (district type with respect to perceptions of quality practices, district enrollment size with respect to planning component inclusion, geographic location, etc.), the importance of his study to that reported here is that Lodes extended the field to assess plan components with respect to perceptions. Again, the Lodes study did not reach down to the school level to include the perceptions of school administrators, nor to gather data regarding the planning process or its products. The study reported here sought to assess perceptions, in a narrower sense, about the development of one of the components of the strategic plan.

Finally, Ray (1996) recently concluded a study of school administrators' (N = 188) perceptions surrounding the use of strategic planning elements in high schools, junior high schools, and elementary schools. The population Ray sought to study was 251 administrators in Cobb County, Georgia schools. The research used a modified version of Reichrath's (1990) Georgia School Planning Questionnaire to gather data about the degree to which the respondents used elements of strategic planning.

Ray concluded that the subjects of her study perceived "that they [were] actively utilizing the strategic planning components of (a) commitment to change and planning; (b) understanding of the external and internal environments; and (c) knowledge of the process of developing, implemeting, and evaluating a strategic plan" (pp. 94-95). She also found there were no statistically significant differences for either main effect or interaction effect when answers were analyzed for school type and respondent position type. Her study extended the field of perception research to the school level to include school administrators at various levels. It also assessed a variety of elements of strategic planning. However, it stopped short of conceptualizing action planning as a discrete component, or isolating perceptions about processes or products of a school level action planning process. The research described here began to address this void. The general approaches to assessment taken in these eight studies created a broad view of content, process, and perceptions, which was narrowed in the following reports that emphasize elements of the planning systems model.

Action Planning and Perceptions. During 1992, Nessmith (1992) published a study designed to determine whether significant relationships existed between selected demographic characteristics of action planning teams and the acceptance of the action plans by the school district's strategic planning team. An action team was a planning team of a subsidiary unit of the school district. Nessmith surveyed action team members (N = 169). The strategic planning team was a district-level oversight body designed to coordinate plan implementation. The study was conducted during the action planning segment of a strategic planning process in one of the nation's largest public school districts.

Nessmith used multiple regression analysis to predict acceptance of plans by the strategic planning team from a model composed of demographic characteristics of action team members. She tested six hypotheses and concluded there were no significant relationships between the action team member demographic characteristics and acceptance of action plans by the strategic planning team. Unfortunately for this research, Nessmith's work did not address the nature of the action plans themselves, the characteristics of the process used to create them, or differences in their relationship to the strategic plan based upon the planning team member characteristics. Answers to questions surrounding these issues would have extended the field in a direction more helpful to this study. Nessmith's specific focus on the action planning aspect of strategic planning did, however, highlight the importance placed upon this portion of district-wide planning. Moreover, her description of action planning was helpful in framing the approach for this research.

Bingham (1996) attempted to determine whether a change in public support would occur due to a public school districts undergoing strategic planning—planning which would culminate with implementation of specific action plans. Bingham's purpose in studying public support was to demonstrate its necessity in assuring adequate funding could be gained for district programs by: (a) involving the community in a broad-based planning effort; and (b) by demonstrating an organized endeavor to implement the plan's action steps.

Bingham surveyed registered voters, and found no significant difference in public support between the groups surveyed before (N = 78) and after (N = 57) completion of the process that included strategic planning and implementation. Bingham's study was another example of research focusing on action planning, and of another study that concentrated on perceptions, albeit this time of community members rather than school administrators. As was the case with the preceding examples, it did not address the approaches used to develop action plans, nor the variations in those developed as a part of the strategic planning process. It did aid this research project by providing an approach to defining and describing action planning.

Culture and Outcomes. Three very different studies addressed aspects of strategic planning not considered by those described in the previous three sections. A comparatively early research study by Basham (1988) was designed to answer several questions posed about strategic planning in Kentucky public schools. Among Basham's questions were: (a) To what degree strategic planning was being utilized in public school districts; (b) what relationships existed between the degree of utilization of strategic planning and the degree of educational productivity as measured by academic achievement test scores; and (c) whether there were relationships between the strategic planning utilization and selected district variables (current expenses, pupil-teacher ratio, cost for instruction, percent local supplement for instructional salaries, percent economically deprived, local financial index, assessed property value per child, percent revenue from local sources, attendance rate, and dropout rate).

Basham's study was useful for this research for two reasons. First, it clearly used a strategic planning model in the design stage of the research. This provided another example for operationalizing strategic planning model concepts for research purposes (as did Freericks [1991] and Ray [1996]). Second, it provided an example of a study constructed to discover the eventual outcome of the planning process, the improvement of student learning in a school district engaged in strategic planning. Once again, the focus on superintendents' responses to questionnaires aimed at a higher organizational level than is helpful for action planning research. Further, the mail questionnaire did not address the process elements of action planning, nor the variability in approaches to the action planning process, as was done in this research.

In a much different vein, a later research project conducted by Kopecky (1996) was based on a hypothesis that the more supportive the culture in an organization the greater the progress that will result in carrying out a strategic plan. Kopecky's methodology depended upon identifying and surveying 20 Wisconsin school districts involved with strategic planning for at least two years. He also visited four of the districts, which added a qualitative component to the study. Kopecky computed a culture/progress index to compare districts to one another, and to find out whether a supportive organizational culture and making progress with a strategic plan were positively correlated.

Kopecky found that his chi-square analysis supported the positive relationship, and his case studies demonstrated that strategic plan progress begat more progress in plan implementation. While Kopecky's was one of a few studies that attempted to correlate successful planning to organizational factors, it did not examine planning systems at the level of school action plans, nor their relationship to district-level plans. Kopecky's study remained focused at the district level, rather than delving down to the school-level in a fashion that builds understanding about what happens within the structure of the district and its schools. This uncharted territory is where this study focused.

The third study in this category reported the examination of factors which inhibited or enhanced the adoption of a strategic planning model at the level of the school

(Baldwin, 1994). Baldwin interviewed 10 elementary staff and followed his interviews with focus groups. He found six factors that elementary school staff understood to advance the adoption of strategic planning at their sites: "professionalism of staff, cohesiveness of staff, leadership of the principal, openness of staff to change, effective communication, and district office support" (p. i).

Similar to Williams' (1992) work which defined key personnel as administrators and teachers who occupy leadership positions, Baldwin's results were helpful in understanding the landscape of perceptions at the school-level. His work supported an approach to investigating the nature and construction of action plans and planning that focused centrally on the school. Baldwin discovered a variety of factors that school staff perceived to enhance and inhibit the planning process—as a process. However, Baldwin's work did not include action plan development specifically, nor address the nature, approach to, or content of such planning over time, or with respect to the district's priorities as set forth in its strategies. The research described here aimed to do this.

Summary and Analysis

The selected research included here provided examples of analyses of strategic plan participants' perceptions, of strategic plan model definitions and assessments, and of various aspects of planning implementations. In six cases (Bingham, 1996; Freericks, 1991; Gehrking, 1996; Hoffman, 1996; Nessmith, 1992; Vincent, 1992; Williams, 1992; Wotring, 1995) the existence of action or operational planning as an important component of the superordinate strategic planning model was acknowledged. This was consistent with the importance placed upon the operational planning portion of the strategic planning systems approach described by earlier referenced authorities (Goodstein et al, 1993; Judson, 1990; Steiner, 1979).

In four of the education planning studies (Bingham, 1996; Freericks, 1991; Hoffman, 1996; Nessmith, 1992) a particular aspect of action planning was researched.

In Bingham's (1996) the focus was on changing public support occuring due to implementation of specific action plans. His work aided the present effort by providing a reference point for defining and describing action planning. Freericks' (1991) research highlighted which school people participated in action plan development, and the components of those plans. The Hoffman (1996) study concluded specifically that action planning was not concentrated upon adequately in the strategic planning process. And Nessmith's (1992) particular focus on the acceptance of action plans based upon the composition of the planning teams led her to conduct research during the action planning segment of a strategic planning process.

These studies were illuminating with respect to public perceptions, differing perceptions of participants, perceptions of inadequate resource devotion, and the impact of planners on action plan acceptability. None of the studies investigated associations between district-level strategic and site-level action planning. Examples noted earlier showed that accepted research (Freericks, 1991; Livesey, 1990; Williams, 1992) did not, although engaged in the process of defining and comparing planning components, examine similarities or differences between action planning approaches, action plan contents, or the plans' relationship to strategies developed at the district-level. Authors contributing to the planning literature emphasized the need to avoid "a disconnect between the intended strategy and what actually [happens]" (Judson, 1990, p. 161).

Analysis of these scholars' works revealed that none of the studies reported evaluating action plans—although Vincent's (1992) project, using a three-year naturalistic approach, examined an overall strategic planning process as it unfolded over time. Additionally, none of the studies compared perceptions of the action planning process and product with the action plans themselves or their reported results. Basham's (1988) early study, however, did attempt to assess the planning process outcome, focusing on measures of whole systems utilization and district-wide educational measurements.

Although it is commonplace for research reports to offer areas for extending research, in two specific studies authors suggested it would be of value to further examine the linkages and associations undertaken by this research. Among Hoffman's (1996) four major recommendations was that further research seek to measure strategic planning success. Hoffman's conclusions and recommendations suggest that measurement of action planning and implementation are points at which one might measure the success of strategic planning. Working at approximately the same time, Hippert (1997) suggested the value of additional research to identify actual results of, rather than perceptions about, the strategic planning process. Both authors' results and resultant recommendations support the scope of research into the action planning process and an attempt to assess planning products, as did Conley's (1993) nation-wide research on strategic planning in school districts:

> These findings ... suggest that the transition from the general to the specific, from the interactive/political to the rationalist, is difficult. Additional research is needed to analyze in more detail the action plans and their relationship to other plan elements. Further study is necessary to determine how action plans are operationalized ... within a framework that addresses district goals and priorities.
>
> This line of research might utilize more focused case studies within a general conceptual framework of the sort suggested (though developed incompletely) in this paper. (p. 26)

The locus of this research project at the school advances the limited research focusing primarily on school-level participants. When not focusing on the entire district with respect to the overall planning system, earlier researchers tended to narrow their data collection to the superintendent or executive management level (Gehrking, 1996; Heller, 1997; Hippert, 1997; Lodes, 1995). Williams (1992), on the other hand, concentrated his efforts upon key personnel at the building level who held leadership positions. Baldwin (1994) conducted a narrower case study in two elementary schools (N=10) using a qualitative-naturalistic approach depending upon interviews and focus groups. Williams' (1992) and Baldwin's (1994) studies provided references for focusing upon few, selected participants at the school level.

In summary, the literature reported in this chapter furnished a research landscape into which this investigation of action planning comfortably fit. The search produced a selection of studies that provided foundations for defining and comparing plan elements and thereby more clearly defining action planning; for analyzing perceptions of a strategic planning system as whole; for analyzing action planning and perceptions associated with action planning as a narrower aspect of a larger system; and for establishing awareness of the influences of district culture on the product, and of the product on district outcomes. Within that landscape it was apparent that no research existed on the links between action plans and strategy, or the approach—described earlier as upward and downward alignment—taken by action planners, or any demonstrated association between approach and product.

If schools are to implement the broad range of changes called for by both public and private bodies, school staff must understand more about characteristics of planning processes in order to develop well-coordinated and useful planning products. The literature did include two methodological examples establishing the success of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in educational planning research to answer such questions. Kopecky (1996) combined quantitative and qualitative research in his study of cultural influences, and Heller's (1997) recent study also provided an example of a project combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to research selected aspects of strategic planning. These foundations, then, set the stage for the next chapter, which describes the procedure for the research results reported in chapter 4.

PROCEDURE

Overview and Rationale

This chapter describes the research design, the setting for the research, and the school district staff who participated in the research process. Provisions for adequate site access are described, as are the data collection strategy and procedures that support the study. The analytical approach and the rationale supporting its selection, complementary to the methodological, political, and sociological roots of the research, are described within the context and content of the case. The chapter opens with a description of, and explanation for, the selection of the research design, called embedded case study. The design was selected to support exploration of action planning and action plan linkages to district strategies, an area not yet adequately studied according to current literature on school district strategic planning (Conley, 1993). Such research suggested a principally qualitative design; yet the content of the case suggested that integrating quantitative methods would further strengthen the analysis (House, 1994; Reichardt & Cook, 1979).

The design described in this chapter includes the five basic components described by Yin (1994): questions, propositions, a specific unit of analysis, logic linking the data to propositions, and standards for interpreting the findings, all of which are described in this and subsequent sections (p. 20). Yin defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 14). As a qualitative method of collecting primary data, it is cited as an often used research method, particularly for policy research, which is in essence what this research comprises (Majchrzak, 1984). As a research strategy, case study is a holistic design incorporating distinct data collection and analysis approaches (Yin, 1994).

The Southcoast School District presented a unique opportunity for a case study. The district was engaged in implementing a specific aspect of a strategic planning system, in this instance tactical planning, which in Southcoast is labeled action planning. The district also offered an opportunity to investigate how members of a system link school district strategies to concrete school-level action planning, and how they perceive they do so. Because the purpose of this research was to discover and analyze relationships between strategic planning and the implementation of strategies, two levels of analysis were necessary. The school district itself naturally served as the macro unit of analysis, or the overall unit of the case study. However, the action planning was being conducted at individual schools—29 of them—which provided opportunities to observe tactical planning in action, and also to distinguish between planning approaches and the products that emerge from the planning process. The schools, therefore, served as the micro unit of analysis. Where there is more than one unit of analysis in a case study, the research design is an embedded case study (Yin, 1994).

There are several advantages of the embedded case study design. It subsumes advantages of both the single case design and the multiple case design. Use of the schools as the sub-unit of analysis provided for between-case comparisons. Use of the schools as the sub-unit of analysis inclined the study toward a focus upon the relationships between the schools and the district. Applied in such a setting, the embedded case study design provided the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the process and outcome variations that are found across multiple sites (Miles & Huberman, 1995).

At the same time, the focus on the district as the overall unit of analysis afforded the opportunity to view the larger policy process and examine the linkage from expectation to implementation, rather than focus on implementation only. The single case concentration is a favored approach in qualitative research, particularly if the case is critical in testing theory, represents an extreme or unique situation, or is a revelatory case due to the opportunity to observe a phenomenon not normally accessible to research (Yin, 1994). This case structure and research process locates this approach to research within the organizational and political case study tradition (Majchrzak, 1984; Yin, 1994).

Research Design

This case study design comprised four phases. First was a series of interviews with the central office administration. This first phase was planned to develop a picture of the expectations held by organization leadership with respect to the desired products of strategic and action planning. Second was an examination of the documents created by the district in the process of policy formulation, and the early stages of implementation at the central office level. This second phase established the basis for one form of triangulation, in practice following a "convergence of multiple sources of evidence" strategy to more clearly establish a multi-dimensional image of reality (Yin, 1994, p. 93). Triangulation here is defined to be the confirmation and validation of findings through data collection from multiple sources and corroboration through comparison to ensure the dependability of field study results (Becker, 1958; Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tuchman, 1981; Webb, Campbell, Schwartz & Sechrest, 1965).

In the third phase attention was shifted to the school level to gather data providing a view of the district's intention from the perspective of the "street-level" implementers, in this case principals and key teachers who were centrally involved in the planning process (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). This third phase provided another form of triangulation, supporting the capacity to compare principals' perspectives with those of central office administrators, and teachers' perspectives with both principals' and central office administrators'. The fourth phase was an examination of school documents relevant to the action planning processes and products. This portion of the case design provided another dimension of triangulation, written communication and action plan content, to compare with the approaches described by principals and teachers.

Credible case study methodology includes an analytical structure to organize and produce useful results from data. A pattern matching approach was used to structure the analytical segment of this research (Yin, 1994, pp. 106-110). This approach is particularly suited to developing the brand of theoretical generalization expected of credible qualitative research (Campbell, 1978; Erickson, 1986). The setting for this study offered an especially inviting environment for this approach, particularly due to the availability of multiple sites for comparison. For each school participating in the study, the process used to develop action plans was diagrammed, and the diagrams compared for pattern similarities (see Appendix H through N for procedural notes, and Appendix R for a sample process diagram). The principals' and teachers' descriptions of the approach they used to produce the action plans was coded, then narratives constructed and compared. The application of the pattern matching approach to analysis in this research was justified by (a) the school district setting, (b) the systematic nature of the planning process, (c) the "within-case" nature of dissimilarities across schools within the district, and (d) the existence of planning systems theory to which an analysis could be tied.

The data collection results were organized in conceptually ordered displays for analysis according to themes and topics (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, pp. 127-141). Displays were constructed in five general topical areas: planning processes, participants, influences, approaches, and action plan contents. Themes relevant to the research questions, which are described in the following chapters, emerged through the display construction, analysis, reconstruction, and re-analysis iterations. The case study setting, and then analysis steps for the interview and document analysis data, and the integration of their products, are described next.

Research Setting

The research was conducted both in the central office and at seven schools within the Southcoast School District. Southcoast is a suburban district covering 60 square miles and located in western Washington, just northeast of Seattle. Within the district boundaries are three incorporated cities, plus unincorporated areas of two of the state's largest most populous counties. Southcoast operated 20 elementary schools, five junior high schools, three high schools, and one alternative school, and served 19,016 full-time equivalent students (19,826 headcount) early in the 1997-98 school year.

Data collection was conducted at seven sites and the central office. Three junior high schools and four elementary schools were selected using reputational, stratified purposeful, convenience (Kuzel, 1992; Patton, 1990, as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994), and maximum variation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) case sampling techniques.

Reputational case selection, selecting the site to sample based upon the recommendation of key informants or experts, was an important method in choosing schools (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Potential sites were suggested during formal and informal interviews with the superintendent, director of business services, and a teachers' association representative. The primary basis for selection was the superintendent's assessment of the extent to which the principal had established a school decision-making system within the school community; a system adequate to support productive involvement and responsibility necessary for collaborative planning. This decision-making attribute was a key objective of the district's strategic plan, and was also the criterion used to solicit suggested sites from the other interviewees. Thus, two top-level administrators' and a key teacher's opinions of suitability were used to identify thirteen schools for potential inclusion as cases within the district setting. Once again, the district itself is the unit which comprises the overall case.

Secondary to the reputational strategy were the stratified purposeful, convenience, and maximum variation strategies. Stratified purposeful is defined as an approach that seeks to identify from the universe of cases those that lend themselves to comparison. Selecting some schools that were identified through the reputational approach as having well-defined and satisfactorily implemented decision-making models, and some that did not, gained both an aspect of similarity and an aspect of variation. Cases that were similar and cases that were different in that regard provided stratification.

Once a set of schools was identified and sorted based upon recommendations, additional attributes were compared. The list of potential sites was narrowed so as to provide a selection representing additional attributes of variation. High schools were eliminated due to pre-existing relationships between the researcher and principals that could contribute unduly to biased results. Junior high schools and elementary schools were selected to be among the study sites because they are organized and function differently, and are generally different in size. Junior high schools were included as well to approximate the size and organizational complexity of a high school. Schools were selected to approximate the variations in size found in the district. Table 4 displays the extent to which the selected sample successfully approximated the distribution of schools by size of student population.

Table 4

School Population Mix Compared to Interview Sample

Size	Size Comparison	
	Population	Sample
Small (<500)	11 (39%)	3 (43%)
Medium (500-900)	11 (39%)	3 (43%)
Large (>900)	6 (21%)	1 (14%)
Total	28 (100%)	7 (100%)

Note. From Southcoast School District monthly enrollment reports, 1996-97.

Schools also were selected to approximate the gender mix of all the principals in the district. Schools were selected to include both old and new sites, and sites geographically dispersed across the district. Tables 5 and 6 display the extent to which the selected sample successfully approximated the distribution of schools by student population size and by the gender of the principal.

Table 5

School Sizes and Principals' Gender

		Principals' Gender	
Size of School	No. of Schools	Male	Female
Small (<500)	11	4	7
Medium (500-900)	11	6	5
Large (>900)	6	3	3
Total[a]	28	13	15

Note. [a]Does not include one junior high not yet opened when statistics were made available. From Southcoast School District monthly enrollment reports, 1996-97; *Southcoast Schools Directory*, 1996-97, pp. 7-8.

Finally, an element of a convenience approach was included by selecting schools in which the principals readily accepted an invitation to participate, with one exception where the principal needed repeated invitations to stimulate agreement to interviews.

Table 6

Principal Population Gender Mix Compared to Interview Sample

	Gender Comparison	
Gender	Population	Sample
Male	13 (46%)	3 (42%)
Female	15 (54%)	4 (57%)
Total[a]	28 (100%)	7 (100%)

Note. [a]Does not include one junior high not yet opened when statistics were made available. From *Southcoast Schools Directory*, 1996-97, pp. 7-8.

In summary, schools were selected because they (a) were perceived to have, or not have, implemented a shared decision-making model; (b) were a junior high or elementary school; (c) fell in one of three size ranges; (d) were led by a male or female; (e) were mature or newly established; (f) and were distant from a school whose principal already had affirmed his or her willingness to participate in this research. This set of criteria provided a sample with variations in staff, leadership, and community characteristics.

Research Participants

In writing on the efficiency of sampling for various problems in the field, Zelditch (1962) enumerates four approaches to selecting informants. This study employed two of the four based upon the policy and process nature of the subject: sequential "sampling to obtain information about institutionalized norms" (p. 572) and selecting "informants with special information" (p. 574). According to Zelditch, "Some things happen that relatively few people know about. A random sample is not a sensible way in which to obtain information about these events ..." (p. 574). Informal discussions with principals in Southcoast prior to the conduct of this research indicated that the entire range of action planning process activities did not involve entire staffs and other school constituents. In addition, studies of strategic planning in schools (as cited in chapter 2) demonstrated that early research expeditions into uncharted aspects of strategic planning depended heavily, and successfully, on a limited number of well-informed participants, such as directors, superintendents, and school administrators.

Following those examples, and Zelditch's advice, at least the principal and one key teacher were interviewed at each school selected. Discussions with principals demonstrated that they varied in age, background, and training. While not characteristics planned for use in the data analysis process (see *Data Collection and Analysis*), this variety was desired (but not required) as another facet of the concept of maximum variation in sampling. In contrast, the sizes and types of schools led by the principals has been demonstrated to account for some variability in their perceptions, so these characteristics were considered as potentially important factors during site selection (Dibski, 1981).

Key teachers were selected based on the principal's identification as a leader or participant in the action planning process. In schools where more than one teacher was identified, as in those with several goal committees or an action planning committee, at least two were selected based upon longevity or depth of their experience with the planning process. At the same time, teachers were also selected because other key teachers suggested their participation, or their names appeared on action planning forms, suggesting they were informed about the planning process. Table 7 displays the number of interviewees who participated in this research, classified by position and type of location within the district.

Table 7

Case Study Participants and Location Summary

	Participants		
Location	Central Office Administrators	School Principals	Teachers
Central Office	5		
Junior High School		4[a]	5
Elementary School		4	7
Teachers' Association			1

Note: [a]Although participation by three junior high principals was planned, four junior high principals were interviewed due to a personnel change mid-study. In this instance a male principal replaced another male principal.

Table 8 displays the number of principal and teacher interviewees who participated, classified by school and gender. Table 8 shows that a preponderance of the teachers recommended as participants by the principals were women, regardless of the gender of the principal. No attempt was made to determine if this was significant to the results.

The aim of selecting school sites, and therefore participants, through multiple recommendations was to provide a multi-dimensional view of the linkages between strategic policy and specific school policy products, namely the action plan goals. This approach was constructed to develop more, rather than less, breadth and depth of perceptions and descriptions of planning processes and influences. Including multiple schools provided more opportunities to observe variation with respect to perceptions of the planning process, district intent, and school-based planning than studying just one school. The opportunity to observe different approaches to planning was expected where principals were included based partially upon key informants' perceptions that they exhibited different approaches to the planning process (for which high or low levels of implementation of a shared decision-making model was the proxy). Considering rec-

Table 8

Case Study School Participants and Locations

	Participants			
	Principals		Teachers	
Location	Men	Women	Men	Women
River Hill		1		3
Valley	1			2
Panorama		1		1
Eastview	1			1
Vista Junior High		1		2
Eastbay Junior High	2			2
Seascape Junior High		1	1	

Notes. One of the two female teachers at Valley Elementary was an administrative intern (released from the classroom) at the time of the planning process and interviews. Although two additional male teachers at Seascape were invited to participate, one did not return repeated telephone calls and one declined to be interviewed, citing his not being a "paperwork-oriented person" and not seeing any value to himself of this research.

ommendations of both key central office administrators and a teachers' association leader provided a form of triangulation to identify sites likely to exhibit varying approaches to planning. The essence of selecting was to include schools whose principals were perceived to express or demonstrate differing approaches to planning and decentralization, lending strength to the confidence of research conclusions through inclusion of variety within the sample (Miles & Huberman, 1995).

Persons in executive management positions at the central office were interviewed. The assistant superintendents of elementary education, secondary education, and curriculum, three executives with direct school management responsibilities, were interviewed, as were the directors of business and strategic planning. In order to learn about the intent of the policy adopted by the district, it was essential to learn what opinions the policy implementers reported about the strategic plan objectives and school action plans. These one-on-one interviews produced data about what central office administrators intended and expected as outcomes of the strategic plan and its objectives, and how they expected principals to approach the school planning process. This established a baseline of terminology and planning structure data to acclimate the interviewer to the district's planning-related language.

Instrumentation

Following an extensive review of the literature, it was concluded that no instrument was available that addressed all or part of the proposed research questions. Therefore, four instrument protocols were prepared and applied collaterally to permit triangulation, or cross-verification on information sources: (a) a semi-structured interview protocol for the central office and initial principal interview, (b) a semi-structured interview protocol for a second principal interview, (c) a semi-structured interview protocol for the teacher interview, and (d) document collection and review protocols. The protocols are described in this section, as is document collection and review.

Interviews

Protocols for semi-structured interviews were used. The protocol for the first principal interviews (Appendix A), which was also used for the central office administrator interviews, contained three questions related to district-level plans and planning expectations, action planning at the school level, and the relationship between action planning and the district-level plan. The protocol for the second interview with principals (Appendix B) focused more specifically on the action planning process, changes in action planning over the past two years, and asked again about the relationship between district and school plans. The protocol for the teacher interviews (Appendix C) was nearly identical to the protocol for the second principal interviews. Question II. A. was modified slightly to address the teacher's experience rather than the principal's.

The relationships of the research questions to the interview protocol questions are displayed in matrix form in Appendix D. The questions in all three interview protocols (Appendices A, B, and C) were structured so that at least two interview questions addressed each of the research questions contained in chapter 1. The interview protocols in Appendices A and B, used for the first and second interviews with principals, contained similar questions in order to provide redundancy in the data gathering process (see *Reliability and Validity*). In addition, the protocols in Appendices B and C, used for the second principal interviews and the teacher interviews, contained warm-up questions that asked about the outcome of plan implementation. These warm-up questions were intended to provide an internal reliability check with respect to participant answers. Warm-up questions were not planned for the central office administrators' and principals' first interviews due to the need to provide an introduction to the study, explain disclosure provisions, and obtain written permission from the participant to collect data from them. Lengthy introductory explanations were not necessary at the outset of the interviews with teachers, as the interviewer anticipated benefit from the referral provided by the principal or another teacher to gain the participant's confidence.

Each interview question had prompts associated with it to guide participants toward specific areas of information in the event they did not independently address the topics those prompts introduced (see Appendices A, B, and C). The interview protocols and prompts were developed from exploratory discussions with school district staff, and were intended to represent potential relationship areas and influences on the action planning process and products this research was designed to explore.

Document Collection and Review

A limited set of documents were systematically collected (see Appendix E) and reviewed (see Appendix F) in connection with the interview and observation sessions. Certain documents were expected to represent the design and implementation of action planning at school sites. Among them were the action plans themselves, formal reports that resulted from the planning process, communications to faculty, communications to parents, and district surveys regarding constituent perceptions of the efficacy of district and school planning. A document review protocol (Appendix E) defining information categories addressed by the documents was applied to each document collected (see *Document Review: Content Analysis* for further description).

Data Collection and Analysis

In summary, data collection occurred in two main phases, with a third phase for follow-up. Interviews and document collection were conducted primarily over two four-week periods during the school year. Some interviews were conducted outside this target period due to interviewee availability. Key informant feedback, which involved verifying data with the interviewees as is described in detail below (see *Reliability and Validity*), was conducted during the analysis and writing stages of this research project. Verification occurred after action plan process diagrams were constructed from interview analyses. Document collection also was conducted during and subsequent to interviews. The instrumentation described in the previous section was used in the data collection activities described below. Data analysis included both qualitative and quantitative methods. This section of this chapter describes the forms of, and procedures for analysis of the interviews and documents, and justification for selecting those methods.

Interview Activities

Interviews of central office administrators occurred prior to the school interviews to permit adjustment of the initial interview guide. This data collection plan anticipated that the task of assessing principal and teacher perceptions and implementation practices—as gleaned from interviews and documents—against policy intent as described by the central office administration would (a) create opportunities to explore similarity and incongruity of envisioned and ensuing products, and (b) require revisiting interviewees and interview content to better understand meaning. The interview plan anticipated that divergent results were likely.

Interview data collection relied on voice recordings rather than the production of field notes. Interviews were conducted in the participants' places of work. In all instances, the administrative staff had offices that were used for private interviews, and teachers were able to use available classrooms, meeting rooms, or staff lounge areas. Exceptions to the taping practice included interviewer observation of a large group session held for school planning at one elementary school, and interviewer participation in informal discussions surrounding district meetings on topics related to the research. During all instances notes were taken and filed according to interviewee or meeting purpose.

Participants were provided a summary of the purpose of the research, a consent form approved by the university's human subjects committee, and an opportunity to ask questions about, or opt out of the study. Interviews began with the first questions listed in the protocols, and lasted approximately 30 to 90 minutes, depending upon the length of the participant's answers. A single tape recorder was used to record each participant's responses. Probes identified in the protocols were used to evoke further responses. Participants were asked to explain responses during the course of the interview, with general follow-up questions such as "Why do you say that?" or "What leads you to answer with that response?" in order to gather perceptions regarding reasons for specific answers. Interview tapes were then transcribed by a word processing service.

Notes were made by the interviewer on protocol copies and note paper during interviews to capture key phrases and descriptions provided by participants. These helped guide pattern coding and analysis processes in the early stages by providing initial structure and key words for coding data. Notes were scanned for similar responses regarding topics (e.g., planning participants, influences), and occasionally reviewed for overviews of participants' comments for summary-level recall during analysis.

The interview transcriptions were analyzed for emerging themes using a pattern coding approach (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, pp. 69-72; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57). Erickson (1986) advises that "the task of pattern analysis is to discover and test those linkages that make the largest possible number of connections to the items of data in the corpus" (p. 148). Sentences with identical and related codes were extracted and organized in a variety of ways to bring to the surface patterns and themes directly tied to the data. Patterns and themes of interest included similarities and differences among principal and teacher perceptions, approaches to planning, action planning processes, and relationships of action plan goals and activities to strategic plan goals and objectives. Tables were constructed to portray the analytical synthesis of interviewees' perceptions with respect to the action plan alignment approach pursued by the principals. Each subcase, representing a school, was classified as exemplifying an upward or downward alignment approach based upon the evidence developed from interviews.

An initial set of codes was constructed using the elements of the strategic planning systems approach developed from the literature, especially Steiner (1979), then embellished with codes developed as a result of early interviews with district staff in preparation for this research (see Appendix G). The coding structure was refined and distilled as successive passes were made through the transcripts. The unit of analysis selected for code application was the sentence. Each sentence that addressed a relevant aspect of the planning process, perceptions, and products was assigned one or more codes. Sentences were also coded based upon interview characteristics, site, and similar mutually exclusive characteristics that emerged during the analysis process (see Appendix G for the final coding structure).

The transcripts were imported into QSR NUD*IST, which is the abbreviation for Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing. NUD*IST is a computer program for qualitative research analysis (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1997). Computerized qualitative research software, and NUD*IST in particular, was selected for this research to improve the quality of the qualitative project by enhancing the researcher's ability to handle larger amounts of data with ease, preserve data context during analysis, develop contextual structures through indexing, support problem solving and theory testing, and establish reliability through automatic logging of research processes (Richards & Richards, 1991). NUD*IST was used to apply and sort codes, and conduct related data organization processes for analysis. NUD*IST facilitated the treatment of each school as a sub-case within the overall case represented by the school district. The interviews and data resulting from non-numeric document content analysis were organized electronically and categorized by case (site) and by other features of the data or its sources. Program reports were reviewed during the course of the data collection and analysis process to augment other reliability assessments.

Document Review: Content Analysis

In addition to interviews of central office administrators, school principals, and key teachers, a variety of district office and school planning documents were collected. Documents were considered key to this research and included in the collection process if they bore directly on the action planning process, meaning they (a) contained strategic plan or action plan elements; (b) described planning processes at the central office or school levels; (c) provided progress reporting on some aspect of the planning process; or (d) described the results of the planning processes (the action plan contents).

Key planning documents included the school district's strategic plan and school action plans. The former was published by the school district, and the latter were available on a local area network file server maintained by the central office. School publications designed to describe the planning process, and action plan reports constructed to describe performance, were also document collection targets. Both planning process announcements and planning products were observed during preliminary visits to schools, and were in some instances communicated through community and parent newsletters.

Documentation was gathered through meetings with staff in the business services office (e.g., strategic plan, school enrollment reports, school statistical abstracts, district survey reports), strategic planning office (e.g., strategic plan, planning process, report on plan process, report on review process), superintendent's office (e.g., strategic plan, board policy on shared decision-making), and during visits to the schools (e.g., memoranda describing process, action plan drafts and final versions, principal newsletters, parent newsletters, PTA newsletters, shared decision-making models, meeting agenda and minutes, school profiles).

Items that did not address specifically some aspect of the planning process, approach, or results were not considered for analysis. Examples include principal newsletters that did not include any reference to planning or the school's priorities related to the plan (e.g., drug use, vaccinations, bus schedule changes, grading schedules, parent-teacher conferences), general student publications (junior high school student newspaper), budget reports, discipline policies, assembly schedules, and the many other documents unrelated to planning that were published by every school in the district.

The document collection occurred primarily during interview visits, with additional collection occurring March through October. It varied by school based upon when plan development activities were occurring or had recently been concluded. This provided opportunities for data collection during and immediately subsequent to planning processes and discussions, when the topic was fresh in participants' minds, and documents were being produced.

Examination of documents central to the action planning portion of this district's implementation of a strategic planning systems approach presents an opportunity to add strength to the analysis through a form of triangulation—multiple methodologies. The document collection aspect of this research contributed to three of the five forms of triangulation: multiple data sources, multiple methodologies, and different data types (Denzin, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1987; Yin, 1994).

Document review took two forms in this analysis. The first was a review of documents communicating information about planning processes and school action plans and planning. In this instance, documents were treated as if they were interviews, and coded accordingly. While not necessarily a simple task, it is less complex than the second form, content analysis, which was be applied to the action plan goals themselves and is described below. The communication documents, such as PTSA newsletters, principal newsletters, staff memoranda, and meeting minutes, enriched the interview results with examples of communications about the process and approach taken by the principal and planning participants. The communication documents were neither coded nor analyzed in-depth.

The second form of document review involved the application of a content analysis process, a potent communications analysis procedure described by Berelson (1971), Carley (1994), Holsti (1969), Krippendorff (1980), North, Holsti, Zaninovich, and Zinnes (1963), Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrist (1981), and Weber (1990), in the study of action plans. Berelson (1971) explains that "content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). As communication tools, the plan documents collected lent themselves to this method of analysis.

Two phases of analysis were applied to the strategic and action plan contents, in this instance the goal statements. Initially, the strategic plans' goal and objective statement contents were preliminarily coded. Then action plan goals were coded. This data was reviewed at the second step of the process, conforming to Bailey's (1994) advice. At that point unique codes representing themes and characteristics of the strategic plan goals and objectives and action plan goals were assigned to the data.

Second, the occurrence of strategic plan terminology and action plan terminology was analyzed based upon the approach described by principals as being used by them to develop action plans. (The classification of approach was determined through the analysis of interview data, as noted under the heading, *Interview Activities*.) "Occasionally one may wish to apply inferential statistical tests of significance to the data. Usually, given the conditions of data collection, nonparametric tests, such as chi-square and the Mann-Whitney two-tailed test of rank-order correlation are more appropriate than are parametric statistics" (Erickson, 1986, p. 151). Chi-square statistics were selected to determine if statistically significant differences exist between principals' plan contents when they are classified according to their alignment approach. Chi-square analyses were performed using processes described in *SYSTAT: Statistics, version 5.2 edition* (Wilkinson, Hill & Vang, 1992). Nonparametric statistics for inferential purposes were selected because: (a) the data were collected from a non-random sample of the population of principals in the district (a normally distributed sample can not be assumed); (b) the population of principals was very small; and (c) there was no assumption that the results will exhibit homogeneity of responses (Gravetter & Wallnau, 1996).

Synthesis

The culmination of data collection and analysis were the narratives explicating the process of, and approach to, action planning as described by principals and key teachers who were school action planning participants (see chapter 4). Descriptive narrative was augmented with tables that display results of pattern analyses, and tables that display statistical treatments of data distilled from document content analysis. Analysis of the interview and communication documentation provided indications of the process and approach for determination of action plan goal alignment (see the *Action Planning Approaches* section).

Alignment of action plan goals served as critical variables for statistical inferences. Analyses of the strategic plan goals and objectives produced codes that were nominated as variables through assignment of nominal values. Analyses of the action plan goals also resulted in codes assigned nominal values and identified as variables. Non-parametric statistics provided a tool to measure the association between variables. Data displays and their accompanying narratives were organized to answer the research questions stated in chapter 1.

Reliability and Validity

This final section of the procedure chapter reviews several reliability and validity issues associated with research designs in general, case study methodology in particular, and describes the procedural tactics employed to compensate for various reliability and validity threats. Case study design must address four aspects of reliability and validity: (a) reliability, (b) construct validity, (c) internal validity, and (d) external validity (Yin, 1994). Table 9 demonstrates (a) the relationship between those four aspects; (b) specific tactics which, integrated into the design and execution, increased confidence in the research quality; and (c) when in the case study process the tactics were employed. How the procedures used in this research addressed each of these commonly accepted aspects of reliability and validity is identified below (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

Table 9

Case Study Tactics

Tests	Case study tactic	Phase of research in which tactic occurs
Construct validity	• use multiple sources of evidence	• data collection
	• establish chain of evidence	• data collection
	• have key informants review draft case study report	• composition
Internal validity	• do pattern-matching	• data analysis
	• do explanation building	• data analysis
	• do time-series analysis	• data analysis
External validity	• use replication logic in multiple case studies	• research design
Reliability	• use case study protocol	• data collection
	• develop case study data base	• data collection

Note. Adapted from R. K. Yin, 1994, *Case Study Research*, 2nd ed., p. 33. Copyright 1994 by Sage Publications, Inc.

Construct Validity

Case study design must be particularly careful to delineate specifically the nature of the changes that are to be examined in the research, and that the measures selected to demonstrate these changes actually indicate the changes that have been chosen for study

(Yin, 1994). Four tactics within this case study design were utilized to establish adequacy of the study's construct validity as developed in the course of the research: (a) multiple sources of evidence; (b) chain of evidence; (c) key informant review; and (d) expert sources of terminology.

Six sources of evidence, used in concert, strengthen the validity of the constructs employed in the case study: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts (Yin, 1994, p. 80). This study relied upon three of the six sources: documentation, archival records, and interviews. Weakness of documentation—inability to retrieve documents, selectivity bias if data collection is incomplete; reporting bias of author; and deliberately blocked access—was countered using four techniques. First, the same or similar documents were gathered from multiple sites. Second, wherever possible the same or similar documents were gathered from multiple participants at sites. Third, interviewees were asked about documentation both during interviews and in follow-up calls or feedback processes. Based upon commitments of participants and availability of documents through public information requests, it is unlikely that access to documents was blocked. Fourth, reporting bias was offset by the maintenance of evidence chains and establishment of an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability.

An added weakness associated with archival records is that they are often inaccessible due to privacy reasons (Yin, 1994). In this instance archival records are primarily action plans filed with the district's central office. This potential for bias was offset by obtaining all of the action plans submitted to the central office, and then comparing them with the plans provided by the principals and teachers. The availability of these plans was established prior to seeking approval for the research project, and access to them was provided by a letter from the superintendent.

Finally, the content validity of documents and the potential for overreliance on such documents was addressed through the review procedures. Each document was assessed separately to determine the specific purpose for which it was written and the audience for which it was intended. By constantly attempting to impeach the reliability of the document during analysis by comparing the data to other sources, the likelihood of being misled by the evidence it presented or incorrectly interpreting the content was reduced (Yin, 1994, p. 81).

The weaknesses of interviews as a data collection tactic are: (a) bias due to poorly constructed questions; (b) response bias; (c) inaccuracies due to poor recall; and (d) reflexivity, the interviewee providing what the interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 1994). The threat of poor question construction bias was compensated for by the review of questions by doctoral supervisory committee members. The threat of poor response bias was compensated for by comparison of wording to terms used in district documentation, and comparison of wording to terms used in theoretical and research-based sources. The threat of inaccuracies due to poor recall was reduced by (a) the inclusion of prompts to aid recall, which also served to broaden and deepen responses, and (b) the use of a flexible questioning strategy in the semi-structured format and approach. The latter permitted reordering and revisiting questions once memory was aided by other questions. Finally, there was little that could be done to counter interviewees framing answers they anticipated the interviewer wanted to hear; indeed, on at least one occasion that behavior was suspected. The best defenses against this validity threat were asking questions of interviewees two times in differing ways, and asking at least one other person per site similar questions for corroboration, which was done routinely.

Constructing an apparent "logical chain of evidence" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 260) strengthens construct validity through carefully linking data to claims. Chapter 4 of this research report provides references to original sources and analysis processes, as well as reproduction of key processes in Appendices H through N, to sustain a review of the evidence and to support a test of the conclusions against the evidence. References also provide a method to validate the process of data collection, and the data manipulation during analysis that are claimed to support the study conclusions. Chain of evidence reference-building was accomplished primarily via audio tape transcript references automatically created and stored by NUD*IST. Reference-building was accomplished secondarily via analytical memoranda, which were maintained in a notebook with the interview transcriptions. This tactic demonstrates the strength of multiple participants; with different points of view, verification of claims, identification and accounting for countervailing evidence, evidence of concept relationships, and the completion of the chain from "antecedents to outcomes" (p. 260).

Key informant review is a third tactic for establishing construct validity. This was accomplished in three ways to avoid introducing bias into the results: verification of process diagrams by participants; verification of accuracy of quotations through transcript review; and verification of reasonableness of conclusions, gathering reactions as a method of "reinterviewing" participants (Yin, 1994, p. 144; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 260). Principals were asked for verification of action planning process diagrams to strengthen construct validity. Errors in process descriptions and diagrams were corrected to their responses, and then verified against key teacher responses.

Finally, expert sources were used to develop and verify the meaning of terms included in the definitions of the research proposal, the questions, and the labels applied to action planning process elements, decision points, and outcomes. Expert sources include Bryson (1988), Kaufman (1992, 1995), Mauriel (1989), McCune (1986), Posey and Hofmann (1989), and Steiner (1979), as well as the school district's director of planning. The terminology used in framing the study questions was drawn from and compared to those used in the literature. The terminology used in the interview questions was compared to district publications describing strategic and action plans.

A common action planning process diagram was drawn from the process diagrams developed for individual schools'. The individual schools' diagrams were reviewed for accuracy by principals. The common action planning process diagram was reviewed for accuracy by the district's director of planning. The common action planning process diagram also was reviewed for accuracy by an expert source cited in the strategic planning literature. The planning director's review was sought to test the validity of the process she experienced in the schools. The expert source's review was sought to test the validity of the constructs vis-à-vis the strategic planning literature citations.

Internal Validity

Tuckman (1994) explains that a study possesses internal validity when:

> ... the outcome of the study is a function of the program or approach being tested rather than the result of other causes not systematically dealt with in the study. Internal validity affects our *certainty* that the research results can be accepted, based on the design of the study. (p. 6)

In ascertaining the extent to which research may be said to exhibit internal validity, the design normally seeks to control eight variables: history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, statistical regression, selection, experimental mortality, and selection-maturation interaction (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Because this design is not experimental in nature, most of these variables are not germane to the procedures in the same fashion, nor may they be tested for in the same manner as with experimental procedures. However, their potential effects merited consideration and, in several instances based upon the research plan, were compensated for as suggested in the contemporary literature on qualitative research.

History and maturation effects are to be expected in the course of the study. Over the course of the interviews and document collection, participants received training, processed planning and even interview information in groups, and utilized district resources to change the manner in which they plan. The structure of the interview questions and collection of documentation from multiple sites and sources was designed to gather information on the participants' perceptions of these influences, which are considered a factor in their approaches to planning.

However, this research design did not anticipate inclusion of measurements for these influences, rather it anticipates participant discussions of the influences as a factor of importance to the interviewees. It is to be expected that after two or three more iterations of planning, the participants would answer the questions differently. This does not eliminate the validity of their experiences at the point in time they are interviewed about the aspects of planning this study addresses. The likelihood that planning is influenced by so many factors as to render precise measurement of these factors and their effects on process, content, and outcomes implausible does not vitiate the value of an initial attempt to map specific processes.

The nature of the instruments, protocols for semi-structured interviews, are not intended to produce data to be assessed as if test items. The questions were designed, in part, to evoke information about changes over time. So it is important that the resultant data describe changes, but it is not something that is practically measured within this descriptive aspect of the research. The proxy for such measurements here was describing the differences in the narratives that underlay that analysis and accompany the resulting planning flow diagrams.

Testing and instrumentation effects, normally addressed in the development and administration of measurement instruments, are considered in the structure of the interview protocols. Questions were developed to seek the same information from at least two approaches, as described in the section on instrumentation. Question order was designed to develop a base of information from the participant before the more critical questions, those that could lead to bias in subsequent answers, were asked (Babbie, 1990).

At the same time, the semi-structured interview was intended to be flexible. It permitted interpretations by interviewees that helped lead to understanding their construction of reality. This study design anticipated that planning processes might be viewed differently at different schools. This was compensated for during the process by asking clarifying questions and thereby developing a record of the respondent's meaning during the procedure. Elimination of testing and instrumentation effects were, therefore, traded in favor of developing local meaning which could be compared (a) across sites as well as (b) to the meaning anticipated in the design and construction of instrumentation. The effects of testing and measurement were expected to be reduced by sorting responses by codes designated to the assigned meaning, comparing across interviews for consistency, and then revising assigned meanings to accommodate the data.

Selection is always a key concern in studies relying upon the strength of randomization and sampling techniques. In this instance, the use of case sampling logic supplanted those approaches used to gain statistical power with variant and reputational case selection (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). The power of selection was gained by including schools in the district that exhibited variation in process and approaches to planning based upon the observation of insider experts. With the very few number of schools included in the research, opportunity for mortality effects increased. Departure of a principal or key teacher during the course of data collection was expected to be damaging. This was guarded against through the short-lived data collection process. One school, Eastbay Junior High, did experience principal turnover mid-study. In this case what amounts to maturation effect was compensated for by the strength of the documentation at this school, and addition of a second key teacher interview by referral from the first teacher. Finally, due to the non-experimental nature of the design, statistical regression and selection-maturation effects are not applicable to the study.

External Validity

Because case studies normally are not generalizing to a larger population, and because this case study was designed to contribute to theory development, different considerations were applied (Yin, 1994). In the research described here, the objective was to discover how and to what extent principals develop school action plans and align them with district-level strategic goals and objectives. This study focused on the concepts and nature of a planning process element at one particular point in the larger scheme of a strategic planning systems approach using one school district as a case.

Qualitative research uses a technique similar to repeating scientific experiments to verify findings and establish generalizability from one experiment to another. Replication logic is a key tactic in building generalizability from case to case in the sense that survey research builds generalizability with statistical generalization (Yin, 1994). This tactic is normally applied to multiple-case designs. However, in this research the embedded case study design, by virtue of including multiple schools, appropriates the repetitive aspect of the multiple-case design for similar strength. The selection process used to choose schools for inclusion was developed to meet the tests of "literal replication" as well as "theoretical replication" (p. 46). Schools were included that might produce similar results and schools were included that might produce contrasting results for predictable reasons (e.g., the principal's approach to planning). "The theoretical framework later becomes the vehicle for generalizing to new cases, again similar to the role played in cross-experiment designs" (p. 46). External validity was gained in this research not through generalization to the population of schools, but rather in the development of a planning model that might be found or replicated at other schools. Only through subsequent repetition of this study can it be determined if other districts' schools use similar processes (see chapter 4).

Reliability

Reliability, the ability to demonstrate another researcher would develop the same data and arrive at the same conclusions given that same data, was strengthened in several ways. First, a case study protocol was employed in the form of a research proposal. The case study protocol was important because it helped to maintain focus on the study purpose, and to anticipate and prepare remedies for potential problems (Yin, 1994).

Second, a case study database was employed to provide other researchers ready access to the data and methods used to arrive at conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994). The case study database includes a comprehensive index of all interviews, transcriptions, documents, procedural memos, analytical memos, and other materials on which the results in chapter 4 are based.

Third, interview protocols, ensuring that similar procedures and verbiage are used with all of the participants, were used to guide the interviews. The interview protocols were designed to ascertain participant's perceptions of their behavior, others' behavior, influences on behavior, and the effects of the behavior (Tuckman, 1994).

Fourth, interview recordings were transcribed by an independent word processing contractor. A random sample of 20 percent of the transcripts was selected and compared to the audio tapes to establish transcription reliability. Reliability was calculated as total errors divided by total words times 100, the result of which is subtracted from 100 to achieve a percentage of agreement. Transcription errors were reviewed and corrected by the interviewer to establish clarity. All transcripts were reviewed for difficult-to-understand passages (marked by the transcriptionist with three question marks and the tape counter number), and those passages corrected or marked unintelligible. Unintelligible passages were eliminated from subsequent analysis. Table 10 shows the reliability rate of each of the randomly selected tapes, and the overall reliability percentage of 98.19 for the randomly selected sample of six tapes. Two additional tapes were tested due to interviewer concerns about a poor recording environment and multiple simultaneous respondents in a group interview. The reliabilities of those transcriptions were 99.49 percent and 99.08 percent respectively, resulting in an overall reliability of 98.48 percent for a 27 percent sample of interviews.

Fifth, the specified unit of analysis for coding is the sentence. Each sentence that addressed a relevant aspect of the planning process, perceptions, and products was assigned one or more codes. As coding was completed, a second coder was provided a sample of 20 percent of the interview data (considered an adequate size to assess reliability), as well as the entire code structure and definitions, for an independent coding check (Lacy & Riffe, 1996). These samples of interview sentences were coded for assessment of intercoder reliability. An intercoder reliability coefficient higher than .70 was anticipated as unlikely to be obtained at first (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64).

Table 10

Interview Transcription Reliability

		Reliability Factors	
Interviewees	Reliability	Total Errors	Total Words
Barker (6/3/98)	98.74%	87	6,890
Storey (5/6/97)	96.69%	144	4,344
Brewster (6/5/97)	96.46%	114	3,218
Faucet (6/23/98)	99.02%	56	5,688
Locken (9/25/98)	98.97%	60	5,810
Penn (6/10/98)	98.06%	127	6,548
Total	98.19%	588	32,498

Review of the codes and application decision-making produced revisions to establish .80 as a minimally acceptable coefficient. When a lower coefficient was calculated, the coders examined discrepancies, and arrived at a mutually acceptable decision to revise coding. The decision was based upon the code's meaning and review of data coded at that NUD*IST node.

Finally, establishing and maintaining a "chain of evidence" is, in addition to a source of construct validity, a source of reliability in case studies (Yin, 1994, p. 98). The study report contains references to original sources and specific analysis processes (via table notes) to sustain a review of evidence, data collection processes, and data manipulation during analysis in order to support the study conclusions. This is accomplished via interview tape transcript references and analytical memoranda, the latter of which are maintained in a notebook with the transcriptions or within the NUD*IST nodes.

Transcript references appear as notations including the interviewee name and interview date at the end of each quotation (for example, "[Mike, 19970615]"). Text unit numbers were retained in the final draft edition at the end of each sentence and not included within the final interview transcript reference. Through this methodical approach to organizing data collection and preparation, data analysis, and reporting, the reliability of the development of the claims asserted in answer to the study questions was established for verification.

RESULTS

The principal findings of this research on action planning are presented in three areas: (a) action planning processes, both individually and across schools, in comparison with a published model, and with respect to the planning participants; (b) action planning approaches, including the expectations of five central office administrators, perceptions of principals and key teachers at the schools, and the influences on the process and content; and (c) action plan contents, including an assessment of their relationship to the strategic plan, differences among schools, and relationship to principals' approaches to alignment. This structure emerged from the analysis of interviews and the data reduction processes, which were organized along the lines of the research questions. Fictitious names of schools and participants are used to maintain confidentiality.

The Strategic Plan

The starting point for the analysis of the relationship between the district's strategic plan and its schools' action plan goals and action planning processes was the strategic plan itself (see Appendix O). The district had engaged in two strategic planning processes. The process used to develop the strategic plan utilized community input, refinement of plan goals and objectives by a district-wide committee, and adoption by the board of directors (Southcoast School District, 1995). Principals and teachers commented that the content of the strategic plan appeared to them to be patterned after a model offered by the Washington Alliance for Better Schools [Jack, 19980609].

The strategic plan comprised five goals that were priorities of the entire school district. Each goal had from four to six subordinate objectives. These 24 objectives were an integral part of the plan and described how the district's staff were to go about achieving the five goals. The action plan format developed by the district for use by the schools required each school goal to address at least one strategic plan goal and at least one strategic plan objective.

Action Planning Processes

This section contains condensed descriptions of each school's planning process, descriptions of who participated in the development of the plans, and an action planning common process derived from schools' process steps. The common process is compared to models in the strategic planning literature.

Individual School Processes

In large part, two questions guided the data collection and analysis process described in chapter 3. How do principals develop action plans? And, why do principals use the planning method they describe? This section addresses the "how" of the action planning process for each school.

River Hill Elementary. River Hill began with an assessment training inservice for three teachers to help analyze assessment data collected from the school's students; to determine a problem area or areas; and to develop potential goal statements to bring back to the school. These teachers met as an assessment team to determine how to engage the staff, and to determine if a math goal was acceptable. Several small group meetings were held across the school to begin to inform other staff.

A school staff meeting, an introductory session at which a decision was not expected, was held to discuss the math goal recommendation from the assessment team. After a month of opportunity for intraschool discussion by school staff of the math goal recommendation, another school staff meeting was held to arrive at consensus to adopt the recommendation.

Next, an inservice committee meeting was held to determine a process for developing activities supportive of accomplishing the math goal. The district's strategic planning director led a staff training and processing session at which the participants generated action plan activities (called "strategies" by staff) for the action plan goal. The indicated result was 30 - 60 activities which were referred to a volunteer task force for synthesis. The strategies task force processed the staff meeting input, selecting five action plan activities to recommend to the school staff.

Subsequently, the principal held a parent meeting to discuss math strategies with parents, and to gather input prior to a staff decision on the strategies. Following the parent meeting a school staff consensus was obtained on the action plan activities recommended by the strategies task force. Following action plan activity adoption, the standards and assessment committee chair wrote the final action plan from the activities language. See Appendices Q and R for a detailed description and diagram of this process.

At River Hill, the principal made extensive use of a small core of teachers to take training and then lead the balance of the staff in applying the assessment results to planning. Several principal's newsletters announced results of assessments and the specifics of the schools progress in making changes in the indicators selected by the staff for the 1997-98 goals. The use of committees in between general staff meetings was primarily to synthesize information developed at the larger meetings, and to develop the content for the next step of the planning process. The process was sequential in nature, and committees were not used to make decisions, rather to frame them.

Valley Elementary. Two steps laid a foundation for planning at Valley Elementary. A planning committee was identified and assembled using the school advisory council, expanded by volunteers. Once the process was designed it was introduced during a staff meeting to provide the school staff a preliminary overview. At this meeting staff were surveyed regarding programmatic needs, described by the school administration as a needs assessment. Brainstormed goals were reduced to four potential school action plan goals believed to have the best merit.

Next, Valley communicated with parents through a parent (PTA) meeting and parent newsletter. Parent input was informational and contributory, rather than decision-oriented. Parents suggested ideas regarding the school goals developed by faculty.

Then the staff was surveyed at a school staff meeting for their reaction to the goals and supporting activities. The goals received approval, but not the activities, particularly the use and availability of paid teacher release time. The recommendation was referred to the school's advisory council.

The advisory council approved a recommendation on the action plan goals, sending it to the action planning task force to review the release time issue. According to the principal this was a parallel step in the planning process: these advisory and grant writing/action planning task force meetings operated on parallel tracks. The grant writing/action planning task force (the school's SLIBG committee) refined the staff survey results and developed a final activities recommendation to support the goals.

The task force again surveyed the staff at a meeting on the school's goals activities. Concerns were raised over the teacher schedule portion. This was referred to the advisory council, which reviewed the teacher schedule and approved the existing recommendation for referral back to the school staff. The school held another staff meeting to gain final approval of school action plan activities. This was followed by a school staff inservice in the fall at the start of the plan implementation year.

Valley made use of a "plan to plan" step not found in other schools. It also used multiple committees surrounding the actual planning process. The committees were not curriculum oriented, serving instead to manage elements of the planning process as a significant function.

Panorama Elementary. At the outset of the 1997-98 school year three committees, technology, writing, and community involvement, began meeting. Panorama committees formed around the 1997-98 goals, included parents routinely, as served as working groups that developed the 1998-99 goals. This was a change for Panorama. The previous year "action planning came out of the inservice committee, and then went to the whole staff" [Betty, 19980615].

During the fall, school staff attended an Alliance workshop to learn to apply data to developing goals. Workshop participants were expected to identify and analyze assessment data to support 1997-98 goal recommendations to staff. Next, at a school meeting, the principal, teachers, classified employees, and parents arrived at a general consensus, but not a firm decision, to carry forward the same action plan goals for 1998-99 as for 1997-98.

Regularly scheduled committee meetings ensued, with portions devoted to planning while staff and parents worked to implement 1997-98 goals. Committees developed a stronger sense of the progress on 1997-98 goals, shared with the committees' parents, and built consensus on 1998-99 goals and determined the acceptability of the goals to parents. These meetings solidified committee participants' acceptance of the goals.

In the spring, school staff formally adopted 1998-99 action plan goals. More committee meetings occurred to draft activities for 1998-99. School staff meetings were held in May to process the adoption of the action plan activities, which formally completed the action plan for 1998-99, except typing and submitting the forms.

Eastview Elementary. The first step in the planning process at Eastview consisted of the principal establishing a group to lead the planning process. However, the principal indicated that the subsequent training workshop initiated the activities. Planning responsibility shifted from the building goals committee in 1996-97 to the leadership team in 1997-98, which comprised department heads and a Title I teacher.

Next came a workshop in the fall and in the winter. The leadership team attended a Tom Jones strategic planning workshop, the first step in staff working with the Alliance to use student achievement data for establishing performance targets and school goals. Another Alliance-sponsored workshop for the principal and leadership team teachers followed in the winter.

Following the training activities the principal held a school staff meeting to use the leadership team workshop results to select "target goals" for 1998-99. Participants included the principal, teachers, classified employees, and two parents. The strategic planning director served as a facilitator for development of potential "target goals."

Subsequently, the principal and leadership team met to use the target goals to write actual school action plan verbiage, including activity language, and to establish measures and set performance targets for 1998-99. The action plan activities and targets were presented to staff at the ensuing school meeting, a key decision point. Once the leadership team constructed the action plan draft, the school staff met to consider the goal, activity, and performance target recommendation, adopting the activities and therefore the complete action plan.

Vista Junior High. Vista Junior's first planning process step was a staff workshop sponsored by the Alliance and the state superintendent of public instruction. The principal and selected teachers attending the workshop found it was designed for self-development of school strategies. So they developed possible school goals.

The next step of the planning process was further development of possible school goals through the department head meetings. This was an iterative process. The principal assembled a team, quite often the department heads, but sometimes the SLIBG committee, to make recommendations to be discussed with the faculty. Department heads talked individually to department members and then reported back to the planning group, resulting in development of goals for prioritization and selection by the full staff.

At a subsequent faculty meeting staff voted on possible school goals. This was followed by a SLIBG committee meeting to gather performance data and then determine progress on the school's 1997-98 goals. The reported result of the SLIBG meeting was central office reporting and information for 1998-99 goal development. Data gathering and formulation of progress occurred with the SLIBG committee members, whose participants included the principal, assistant principals, teachers, and parents.

Another key SLIBG committee meeting followed to gather additional input from committee members on school goals in preparation for introducing the final action plan. In this step, the SLIBG plan and related budget was finalized. One key teacher viewed the planning process as being formally concluded at this stage, stating the action plan was "decided upon within the SLIBG committee" [Allie, 19981007].

Following the SLIBG meeting the final action plan goals and related assignments and budget allocating the SLIBG funds were introduced at a staff meeting. The principal, assistant principals, teachers, and classified employees arrived at consensus on the action plan. The school staff as a body did not take additional action until the school staff inservice held in fall when teachers returned. This step was to remind teachers of the 1998-99 goals and introduce the final details of the action plan activities.

Eastbay Junior High. Eastbay Junior High's principal began the planning process with informal discussions with key individuals and groups at the school. Prior to formal planning activities the principal informally gathered input on likely goal areas from various staff in a variety of settings. The principal also informally gathered input in department head meetings. The perceived result of these sessions was goal concepts known to the principal that contributed to his sense of the likely direction felt within the teacher leadership corps. Combined with his sense of the district's direction, he considered this data gathering to have provided him with "not a known outcome, but .... a pretty narrow area where our goals had better be, where our outcome had better be" [Jack, 19980609].

The school held staff meetings to formulate goal ideas. A significant staff meeting was held at the end of March, at which teachers brainstormed, and then clustered potential ideas after the conclusion of the meeting. Next, selected school staff members, earlier assigned lead responsibilities for 1997-98 goals, prepared reports on the school's progress toward 1997-98 goal achievement, to help determine the 1998-99 goals.

Then the principal held a special parent (PTA) meeting to share the result of school staff input on 1998-99 goals, and to gather goal input. This meeting produced a brainstormed list of goal ideas. Then the school staff met to share the input on 1998-99 goals gathered at the recent staff meeting, to share the parent input on 1998-99 goals gathered at the recent parent meeting, and to develop possible 1998-99 action plan goals, producing a list of potential goals for prioritizing.

Subsequently, the principal met with students through student television station broadcasts to share the planning process and the potential goals developed by school staff and parents, and to gather input for goal setting. The students produced a list of student suggestions for 1998-99 goals. Subsequent to gathering student input, the principal held another parent (PTA) meeting, shared further results of input on 1998-99 goals, and obtained parents' priorities for potential 1998-99 goals.

At another staff meeting the parent input on 1998-99 goal priorities was shared. Initially, the intent of this meeting also was to establish goal priorities. But the mood of the staff at this point in the year was not considered supportive of investing time on the topic. So school staff reviewed parent goal priorities, but delayed until the next school year the completion of the goal and activity priorities. The following fall the staff established 1998-99 goal priorities and committees to develop activities and carry out action plan. The final step in Eastbay Junior High's process was activity committee meetings to develop activities to carry out the action plan.

Seascape Junior High. Seascape's planning process started with parent meetings to gather input regarding goals for the school. Parents provided informal input at the various parent meetings prior to the staff team meetings.

The next planning step was a series of team meetings (ten teams) to assess needs in preparation for establishing action planning goals. The meeting participants—principal, assistant principals, teachers, and classified employees—initially identified through school staff various student achievement needs.

> It's all done through teams at Seascape. I meet with every team, and we start with the conversation, "What do you see currently as the most dramatic need our students have in the academic area?" [Cela, 19980623]

The next step was to gather student achievement data for establishing reasonable goals in concert with the team meeting discussions. From this the principal developed draft goals with the assistance of the teams. During prior planning processes a cabinet meeting, including the principal, assistant principals, and a representative from each of the teacher and classified teams, normally followed the team meetings and data gathering to confirm and adopt the draft goals. In the study year this step was skipped because consensus was so easily arrived at during team meetings and data gathering.

The next two process steps involved gathering support for goals from parents. Parent Network meetings determined parent acceptance of the goals selected by the teams; goals were confirmed by parents attending network meetings. This was followed by a more formal PTSA cabinet meeting to gain goal confirmation by the association, which was obtained. The combination of the Parent Network, the PTSA cabinet, and the school cabinet formed the junior high's governance structure. Next, the implementation team met to develop consensus on activities to support accomplishment of action plan goals. Agreement followed on activities for presentation to staff.

Finally, the school engaged the action plan in a school staff meeting to develop consensus on action plan implementation. This fall meeting was a multi-day retreat and inservice including the principal, assistant principals, teachers, and classified employees, at which the implementation of 1998-99 action plan activities was agreed upon.

Process Commonality

Analysis of the schools' planning processes identified several steps, participants, and perceived influences that were common among the schools. First the process step commonality is described, and a model action planning flow diagram is displayed to portray the common process extracted from the individual schools. Next, the participants described to be involved in the planning process are reported. And finally the results of a comparison of the case study common process to model planning processes found in the literature is described.

Planning Steps. Table 11 displays the planning steps found in the processes described at each of the schools. The planning steps were grouped by process type, and organized by flow from process start to process finish based upon the step purpose and sequence (when the step occurred) in the largest number of schools. Each step is identified as to the sequence in which it occurred at each school in the columns labeled with the schools' name abbreviation. The shortest process is six steps and the lengthiest is 11 steps.

From Table 11, a series of six planning steps common to the majority of schools is identifiable. When all of the planning steps described at the schools, regardless of how many schools described them, are grouped by process type, then ten general planning steps are identifiable. Identification, extraction, and organization of these steps consistent with the manner in which they appeared in one or more of the individual schools' processes produced the components of a common planning process narrative and flowchart. A brief description of each common step is provided, and then a common planning process diagram is displayed.

Table 11

Action Planning Process Steps by School

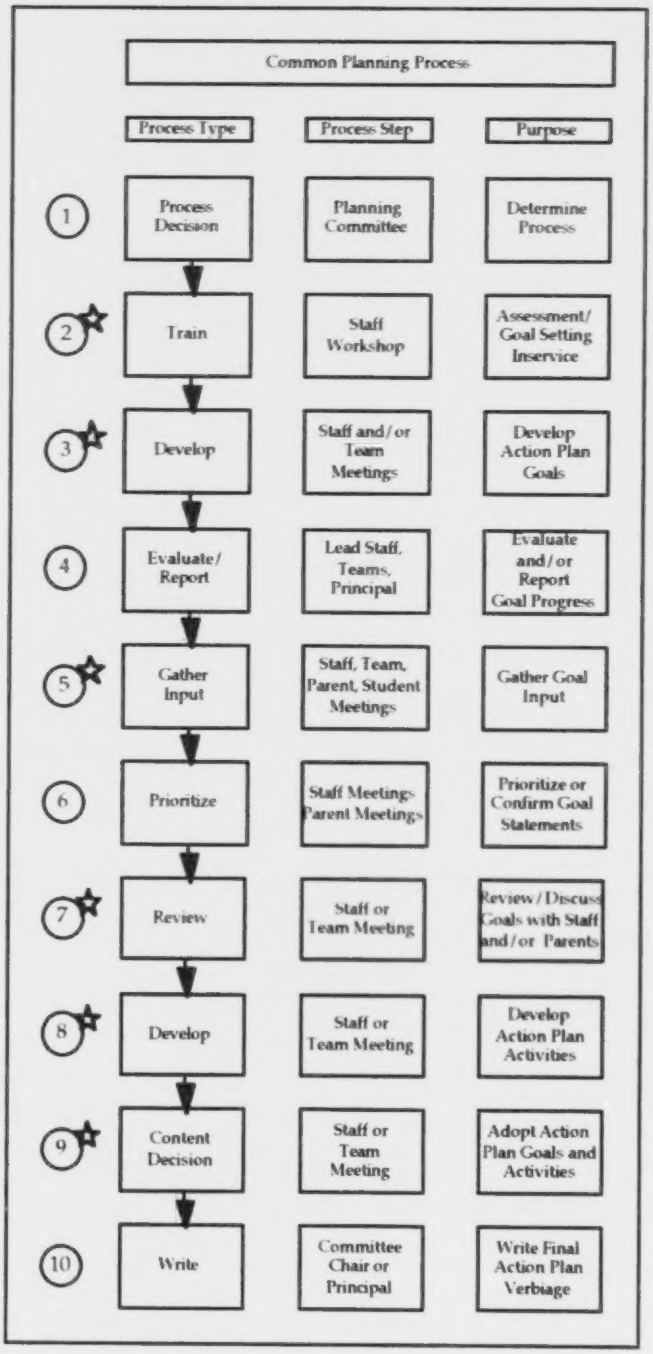
	School[a]						
Process Step	EJH	VJH	SJH	RHE	VE	PE	EE
Action Plan/Strategies/ Task Force/Committees			7	7	6	6	
Assess. Team/Group/Lead Mtngs	4			2			
Department Head Meetings	2	2					
Faculty Advisory/ Site Council/Leadership Team	1		4		5, 8		5
Goals/SLIBG/Comm./Task Force		4, 6					
Inservice/Planning Committee				5	1		1
Parent Meeting	5, 8		1, 5, 6		3		
Principal's Report		5					
Staff Inservice/ Workshop		1	8	1	10	2	2, 3
Staff Meeting	3, 6, 9, 10, 11	3, 7, 8		3, 4, 6, 8, 9	2, 4, 7, 9	3, 5, 7	4, 6
Student Meeting	7						
Team Meetings/Data Gathering			3				
Team/Committee Meetings			2			1, 4	
Write Action Plan				10			
Total Number Steps Per School	11	8	8	10	10	7	6

[a] EJH is Eastbay Junior High. VJH is Vista Junior High. SJH is Seascape Junior High. RHE is River Hill Elementary. VE is Valley Elementary. PE is Panorama Elementary. EE is Eastview Elementary.

Figure 1 displays the resulting action planning common process flowchart. Each of the ten steps in Figure 1 identifies the distinct process type found at one or more schools, and described in detail in the preceding paragraphs. Each of the six steps that comprised the subset of steps found at a majority of the schools is identified by a star. In this figure, "Process Type" labels the general nature of the process sequence as described in the above paragraphs detailing the common process steps. For example, the first type of step in the sequence is a process decision. At this point, usually before other steps occur, a decision is made about how the process will unfold. "Process Step" labels the group and nature of the step, as found at the schools where this step occurred. "Process Purpose" labels the purpose for that particular step.

Step one was a decision on planning process. This was not found at most schools, and was not remarked upon by the principals as part of what they viewed as their planning processes. At two of the schools key teachers were clear about the principal pulling together a small group of staff, referred to as a planning group, leadership team, or at River Hill the inservice committee. At River Hill this step did not occur until mid-way through the process. In the common process this group is referred to generically as a planning committee.

In step two a team of staff engaged in a training activity to prepare themselves to provide leadership in the planning process. Four of the schools identified workshop attendance as an early stage in their planning activities. In the instance of this school district, emphasis was placed upon both use of data in goal setting, and work with one of the educational designs currently popular in public education. The schools in this study attended training sessions sponsored by the Alliance for Education and the state's superintendent of public instruction. Principals and teachers commented on the workshops' focus: using data derived from student learning assessments to set measurable school goals.



Common Planning Process

	Process Type	Process Step	Purpose
1	Process Decision	Planning Committee	Determine Process
2 ☆	Train	Staff Workshop	Assessment/ Goal Setting Inservice
3 ☆	Develop	Staff and/or Team Meetings	Develop Action Plan Goals
4	Evaluate/ Report	Lead Staff, Teams, Principal	Evaluate and/or Report Goal Progress
5 ☆	Gather Input	Staff, Team, Parent, Student Meetings	Gather Goal Input
6	Prioritize	Staff Meetings Parent Meetings	Prioritize or Confirm Goal Statements
7 ☆	Review	Staff or Team Meeting	Review/Discuss Goals with Staff and/or Parents
8 ☆	Develop	Staff or Team Meeting	Develop Action Plan Activities
9 ☆	Content Decision	Staff or Team Meeting	Adopt Action Plan Goals and Activities
10	Write	Committee Chair or Principal	Write Final Action Plan Verbiage

Figure 1 Common Planning Process

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The third generic step in the common process was the development of action plan goals. Five of six of the schools engaged in this step through staff committees of various composition. Principals utilized smaller groups of staff to formulate the annual plan goals, whether labeled department head meetings, assessment team meetings, building team meetings, or group meetings. In one instance a staff meeting was used.

Step four, evaluating and reporting on goal progress, was described by two of the schools. It was likely, however, that all of the schools participated in this step in some fashion. All were required to update their action plans with progress reports during the year in which the action plan was implemented. In one instance, focus was placed on the results assessed at the conclusion of the year: the River Hill principal's newsletter reported school progress toward reaching the goals with specific, measurable results.

Step five, gathering input, primarily for goals but also for activities, was a specific step described by five of the six schools. This step occurred variously before and after the goal development process. Two approaches were taken. In one, the input gathering process occurred prior to goal formulation. In the other, input was gathered from various groups once goal statements were established, but not necessarily adopted. This process step was very similar to the review step that is identified below. However, it was distinguished in that gathering input was described to include a wide variety of constituencies. Principals and teachers described gathering input from department heads, from faculty advisory or site councils, from a goals task force or SLIBG committee, from parent meetings, from student meetings, and from school team meetings. The gathering of input occurred at steps one through seven, and one, three, or four times during the first seven steps of the five schools describing an input gathering step.

Step six of the common process was prioritizing and confirming, and was described at three of the schools. At Eastbay and Eastview, the step was primarily a prioritization of choices. At Eastbay, parents were asked to prioritize, and at Eastview the staff was asked to prioritize. At Seascape, two parent groups were asked to confirm the priorities established by the school staff. In practice, the review and content decision-making steps also embodied the act of prioritizing. However, the development of priorities was established by three schools as a separate and distinct step from deciding upon the goals in their processes. Therefore, it merited consideration as a separate planning process step.

Review, step seven, was described by five schools as a separate step, or separate steps, in the planning process. The nature of a review step, which was also described as a discussion step, differed in two ways from an input gathering step. First, it was described to be an internal process. At the five schools where review was included, it was described to have occurred in general staff meetings or a staff inservice, or as a team or committee meeting process. At Panorama, review was conducted by the goal committees, and was the exception as it did involve invitations to parent members to participate. Its purpose there was largely to determine acceptance level by parent participants. Review and discussion steps occurred twice in the planning process at Eastbay Junior High and River Hill Elementary, for different purposes in both cases. At Eastbay one review step was to discuss the goal ideas generated by staff and parents, and to review the parent priorities. At River Hill one review was for goals and the second was for activities. Five of the seven review steps focused on goals, whereas two focused on activities. Second, where it did occur, review was sequenced after goal input and development processes. Therefore, it served as a "revisiting" of the status of goal development rather than an initial step in the process.

Step eight, developing activities for the action plan, was found at four of the seven schools as a separate process step. All four schools utilized a committee structure to develop activities, two in conjunction with staff meetings that were also designed to develop activities. At one of the two, the staff meeting occurred before the committee meeting. At the other, the staff meeting occurred after the committee meeting. At those two schools activities were the focus of committees in three of their steps. At River Hill the committee refined what the staff developed. At Valley the activity development sub-process went from one committee to the staff and then to another committee before final approval by the staff as part of the complete action plan. Based upon the format established by the central office, the activity level was where the personnel, due date, performance standard, resource (budget) assignment, and status reports were located.

Step nine was a decision step in the common planning process. It was the content decision step, and was identified by six of the seven schools as a discrete step in their planning processes. In fact, content decision occurred at two separate steps at five of the schools, and four times at a sixth. Whether labeled as "deciding" or "approving" at a school, where it occurred it always occurred at least once for action plan goals and once for action plan activities. At Valley Elementary there were both approval and decision steps for goals and activities. At all six of the schools, staff meetings were used to decide goals, and at five of those schools staff meetings were used to decide activities. At the sixth, Eastview, a committee structure was used to approve that activities before the staff decided upon the goals, which by then were accompanied by the action plan activities. So in effect all six schools used staff meetings to approve both, regardless of whether described as such. At the seventh school, Seascape, the principal used a consensus building process among the teams and team leaders to produce agreement on the goals and activities. She skipped the site council approval process described to have occurred in other years. No staff meeting to approve the action plan was described by either the principal or teacher interviewed.

The tenth step, writing the final language of the action plan, was formally described by only one school, River Hill Elementary. The standards and assessment committee chair was tasked by the principal to complete the plan language on the central office-provided format. At Panorama a teacher mentioned that the school secretary handled the plan's final language input (which is distinguishable from crafting plan language), and at all three of the junior high schools the principals admitted to writing the actual action plan language. However, at only the one school was this viewed as a discrete and separately identifiable step. At all seven of the schools a final language writing activity had to occur or the plans could not have been drawn from the data system or provided by the principal. However, the writing could have occurred at various stages in the process and been conducted by teachers, principal, or an administrative intern. It was separately identified in the common process to reflect that reality.

Planning Participants. Participants in the schools' planning processes, and the manner in which individuals and groups participated, varied among the schools. However, as Table 12 demonstrates, some aspects of the participant data were consistent across schools.

At every school the teachers were involved in the planning process. Teachers were more involved than any of the other groups due to their sheer numbers and due to their roles in decision-making processes at each school. As was noted earlier, all but one of the schools held formal decision-making meetings that involved at least the entire teaching staff. The seventh school, Seascape, adopted its plan through an iterative consensus process utilizing the staff teams that were mostly teachers. At each of the schools the principal facilitated the process. At the junior highs, where there were assistant principals, they also participated in the planning process by facilitating or taking part in planning meetings. Variations in the manner in which teachers participated are explained below in the committee activities description.

Parents participated in planning in five of the seven schools. They were involved repeatedly and in large group settings at three of those five schools. Only one of the three, Valley, was an elementary. The others were junior high schools: Eastbay and Seascape. At Valley Elementary the principal met with the school's parent group to gather input. To accomplish the same goal at Seascape, the principal met with the parents who participated in the parent network and parents who were members of the PTSA cabinet. At Eastbay the most extensive parent processing occurred, with the principal conducting multiple meetings with the PTSA attendees and requesting both goal suggestions and priority setting involvement.

At River Hill and Panorama the parents participated through committees, and at River Hill also through attendance at school staff meetings. At both schools parents provided both action plan development input and decision-making input in these settings.

At Eastview and Vista Junior the principals acknowledged that parents were not involved in the planning process at all during the year. In both instances parents were members of the SLIBG committees, but these committees were not reported to contribute to the action planning process.

Committees were used to guide participation, to develop and refine action plan components, and to act as subsidiary decision-making groups at six of the seven schools. The greatest number of committees were used at Seascape, principally because the existing team structure was used to develop the action plan. At Eastbay, no committees were used. The principal acted as a conduit for informally gathering information from small groups of staff, but used large staff, parent, and student groups for formal brainstorming and prioritizing activities.

At the five remaining schools, committees were utilized in a variety of ways to facilitate the action plan construction process: plan the process, assess student learning progress, brainstorm goals and activities, distill brainstorming products, revise draft goals and activities, and decide on final goal and activity language to bring to staff meetings for decision-making on plan adoption.

Table 12

Planning Participants by School

Planning Participants	School RHE	VE	PE	EE	VJH	EJH	SJH
Teachers	Yes[a]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Parents	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Community	No	n/a	Yes	No	No	No	No
Committees	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Classified	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Students	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
School Administration	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
All Staff	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	n/a	Yes

[a] "Yes" means the interviewees answered and evidence existed of participation by the named group. "No" means that answers indicated no participation by the named group. "n/a" means that no answer was provided by the interviewees and evidence of participation was not found.

Classified staff were described as participating in action planning at three of the seven schools; half of the elementaries and one of the three junior high schools. Participation fell into one of two categories: active and passive. For example, at Valley Elementary classified staff were not described as active participants in the planning process. However classified staff were invited to attend meetings and numerous references were made to "all staff."

Those schools that actively included classified staff in the action planning process did so intentionally. At River Hill, the principal was emphatic in stating that *all* staff at the school were responsible for the students' education goals, and therefore *all* staff participated in the planning process:

> [Question: Who participates in your action planning process?] The entire staff. And that's probably where, maybe River Hill differs from other

> schools. My own personal belief is that every single person on this staff is impacted by our goal in one way or another. And so, as a result, every single person has a vote on our goal and on the strategies [activities]. Whether they're certified or classified, it doesn't matter. The entire staff. [Liz, 19980618]

At Panorama members of the classified staff served on the three committees that were responsible for both action plan implementation and action plan development. In particular, school office employees and instructional assistants became involved in committees in which they had a particular interest. And at Seascape the classified staff both comprised their own team, and attended the staff inservice held in retreat at the outset of the school year, prior to the arrival of students. The instructional assistants at Seascape, as at Panorama, participated in planning in an area of interest to them:

> Well, classified's part of staff. So, I had met separately with our instructional assistants, and because they had talked to me about this corrective reading piece, that they were seeing that as a need. .... So they will be part of the training. [Cela, 19980623]

Finally, student participation in the planning process was a rarity. Only one school principal planned and ensured participation by the students. At Eastbay, students were invited to participate in the action planning process through a student television station that broadcasted within the school. Students conducted discussions with the principal and developed a list of suggested goals that were integrated into the plan development along with teachers' and parents' input.

Model Process Comparison

In order to answer the research question "In what ways are the characteristics of action planning as described by principals and key teachers comparable to a selected model described in relevant strategic planning literature?" a comparison was made between the action planning common process and conceptual planning models found in the literature. Given its clarity and use as a reference point within the field, the Steiner (1979) model, which provided a conceptual base for guiding this research, was initially selected for comparison.

Analysis indicated the processes used at the schools bore little resemblance to the tactical or operational planning described in the Steiner model. Steiner's approach addressed the establishment of organizational aims and strategies, as well as the construction of detailed plans for action and the methods for determining their achievement. He defined strategic planning from the perspective of future results of current decision, process, philosophy, and structure. Virtually nothing in Steiner resembled the individual schools' processes or the common process derived from them. To determine if this outcome was an anomaly, Kaufman (1995) and then Mauriel (1989) were also reviewed.

Kaufman (1995) distinguished between three levels of planning: mega, macro, and micro, which applied respectively to the societal setting, to the district or school, and to program (or course, or individual). Analysis of the Kaufman model indicated that the micro level descended to the tactical planning level, and contained 23 discrete steps. Seventeen of the 23 were clearly comparable to steps in the school action planning common process derived from this research. Therefore the school action planning common process was considered analogous to a school-focused tactical planning model found in the literature.

Mauriel (1989) described the major elements of a district-level strategic systems approach to planning, and provided five criteria for goals established to effect instructional improvement. The schools' common process produced goals that met at least three of the criteria set forth by Mauriel, but process steps for developing those goals were not provided by the Mauriel work.

Fundamentally, the processes used at the schools bear little resemblance to the tactical or operational planning described in two of the three pieces of major literature on the subject selected for comparison. Virtually nothing in Steiner (1979) resembled the individual processes or the conceptual model derived from them. Mauriel (1989) described no tactical or action steps processes like these principals were using. Kaufman provided a verbal—not visual—model describing school-level planning steps largely similar to steps used by principals in the seven schools included in the case study.

Action Planning Approaches

The way principals describe their approaches to aligning action plans with the district strategic plan may be classified into two categories: upward alignment and downward alignment, as described in chapter 2. This section begins with a segment describing the expectations of central office administrators in relation to alignment.

Central Office Expectations

Central office administrators indicated expectations of school principals, with respect to the action planning results addressed in this work, were driven by the work of the superintendent and planning director. The strategic plan adopted by the school district's board of directors was produced in conjunction with an initiative taken by the superintendent. That initiative was endorsed by the school directors through support of a community planning process described by two principals, the district's director of planning, and a key teachers' association officer and documented in district publications, and the eventual adoption of a new strategic plan.

Central office administrators described action planning-related expectations of principals as: (a) directly relating school planning to district planning; b) practicing collaborative decision-making; (c) aligning resources with school plans (addressing at a minimum activities within the student learning improvement block grant funding); and (d) improving student achievement. These expectations, except for resource alignment, represent aspects of policy implementation that the data collection anticipated. (The strategic plan does not speak directly to resource alignment, however the action planning form distributed by the district requires principals to identify resources needed to achieve goals.)

Table 13 summarizes the action planning expectations of principals described by the central office administrators interviewed for this study. The two approaches to aligning school goals, downward and upward, were described in chapter 2.

Table 13

Summary of District Leadership Responses to Plan Alignment

	Central Office Administrators[a]				
Action Plan Alignment	HT[b]	BD	NB	TS	DW
Downward Alignment	X	X	X		X
Upward Alignment				X	

[a] Four of six assistant superintendents, and one (strategic planning) of fifteen directors were interviewed.
[b] HT is Harv Truckman, BD is Beth Dill, NB is Ned Bosch, TS is Ted Story, DW is Dorry Whaling.

Downward Alignment. Central office administrators described the expectation that schools design their school action plans in accordance with the provisions of the strategic plan adopted by the district board. This view was initially described in the interviews with central office administrators. Harv, assistant superintendent of secondary education described the expectation:

> There's the strategic plan, that ... sets out five main criteria areas, and any annual plan that school district, action, plan, whatever term you wish to use, we call them action plans here at this school district, their schools develop for their annual goals and objectives, focus in on the strategic plan and the key components of it. .... the bottom line is that

> they're gonna be held accountable for ... high standards ... and implementing the strategic plan in their building ... [Harv, 19970506]

This expectation was expressed by all of the central office administrators. Schools needed to attend to the directions communicated by the district's plan, and develop school plans that would implement the visions in the language adopted by the school district board of directors. Beth, assistant superintendent of elementary schools illustrated the expectation of downward alignment with this statement:

> I think there is the clearly communicated expectation that building plans should support the district strategic plan; that there are choices within our strategic plan and that the building has some choices regarding where their passion is and where the prioritizings lie. Having said that, however, there are components of the strategic plan that every building needs to, is expected to move forward on. So there are some non-negotiables, and beyond that there are some negotiables that are within the strategic plan. [Beth, 19970506]

Dorry, the district's director of strategic planning and staff development, argued that this approach to alignment was key to the entire district achieving the overall goals establish for the schools by the community through the school board:

> ... the action plans have to be tied, and I believe this very, very strongly, the school action plans, departmental action plans, need to be linked to the strategic plan. And, and, I guess the bottom line reason on that has to do with focus. If we're all headed in the same direction, we have a higher probability of reaching the goal. And if the goal is to improve student learning, and we're all working towards that end, we might actually be able to produce it. [Dorry, 19970627]

The concept of downward alignment, although not labeled such by the interviewees, was described by each of the central office administrators interviewed for this study. The expectation of adherence to this approach by principals when planning was also described by each administrator. The expectation of adherence by principals to this approach in their planning was also described by a teachers' association representative:

> ... the intent from where we've been in probably a six year process, is the strategic plan is the driver for the building plans. [Nicky, 19970529]

Upward Alignment. Downward alignment was not, however, exclusively expressed as an expectation by all district administrators. A measure of ambiguity existed in the approaches to planning described by some central office administrators. An alternative to downward alignment was described in a fashion that lent itself to an opposite label: "upward alignment." If downward alignment is illustrated by a school selecting strategic plan goals and developing specific action plans to implement those goals, then upward alignment is exemplified by a school that develops its own objectives, and then selects strategic plan goals that seem to fit. This approach was described by Ted, the assistant superintendent of curriculum, as having been introduced by central office administrators' efforts to communicate the acceptability of some narrowing of focus. Ted described a chart that depicted the school's goal at the center of a circular diagram, with the supporting strategic goals arrayed supportively around the school objective.

> Some of them say, you know, we really got to get these kids learning how to be better writers. And we can only focus on one thing at a time boys, so we're gonna focus on writing. And the district's focused on standards, and it's a great document, we'll take the writing standards, and we got some great trainers .... Now let's take a look at the strategic plan, and see how our goal of getting kids [to be] better writers, either fits the strategic plan, or how we can get the strategic plan to fit, how we can get

> that, that structure to help us with our goal. So, I don't think it works from strategic plan to the goal. It's, here's the goal, how does the strategic plan help us accomplish that goal?
>
> So the goal isn't the strategic plan, it's a structure that supports the goal. And Dorry even made a chart where the elements of the strategic plan were around the outside, and the goal was in the middle..... And you may have an area of the strategic plan that doesn't help, so you don't do anything. And that's a whole different way of looking at it. The strategic plan used to be the master and you try to do stuff in all those areas. [Ted, 19970506]

This particular quotation was the first data collected during the central office administrator interviews that juxtaposed the two approaches. It was also the first descriptive summary of an upward approach that a central office administrator perceived might be taken by principals. This interview was instrumental in creating the questions surrounding the possibility of variation in approaches and planning results. It represents an opposite view of the directional flow of planning processes, and a view supporting the primacy of the needs of the children at one school as opposed to the needs of the children at all of the district's schools.

This interview also served to confirm other interviewees' statements regarding the central office administrators' push, at the behest of the principals, toward simplification of the planning across the district and among the schools, which is described next. According to Beth, Ted, and Dorry the central office administrators noticed that the proliferation of plans at the school level was creating unwanted burden and frustration for principals and teachers. Dorry confirmed that district expectations had been modified following principals' communications with the superintendent regarding the fragmentation of effort resulting from too many goals:

> We're trying to model at central office the ability to reduce and cut. This year also, we told all of our schools and departments, [the superintendent] and I, that he or she with the most goals no longer wins in Southcoast. If you have three goals that are comprehensive, well-done, you've got plenty of goals at your site. You know, in the old days, and the old days I'm saying even as recently as three years ago, he or she who had the most goals was the winner. And that isn't true anymore. [Dorry, 19970627]

The central office administrators described the superintendent and planning director's response to principals as reconceptualizing the relationship that needed to exist between district thrusts and supporting school activities. Simplification became a priority after staff became too bogged down trying to maintain a school plan, a staff development plan, and a student learning improvement block grant plan.

> Schools had a school improvement series of goals. They have self-study series of goals if they were up for self-study that year. They would have strategic plan goals. They would have staff development goals. And then they might even have another series of goals. Some of our schools had five sheets of goals. .... Most of them not aligned and they were wasting their people's time, energy, and triple spending resources. .... we've said, "The action plan is the document for your school .... All of your goals go on it, and you are limited to three." Now, that means it has to be comprehensive, it has to be focused, and we're .... giving you permission to take things off your plate. .... All moneys, all time, all activities need to be focused on the action plan. [Dorry, 19970627]

From the perspective of the central office administrators, it came to be expected that principals would combine multiple plans into a single school action plan. Action plans then could—but not necessarily should—concentrate on a single goal within the strategic plan rather than taking on multiple goals during the year and diffusing staff energies.

To summarize the importance of the data in this section, six findings relating to the study questions resulted from the five central office administrator interviews and documents obtained from the central office:

1. The school district board of directors established a strategic plan (Southcoast School District, 1995b).
2. The board of directors and central office administration expected each school to establish annually an action plan as provided in Strategic Plan Objective 4.1. (Southcoast School District, 1995b).
3. Central office administrators responsible for schools, curriculum, and planning expected principals to develop action plans to implement the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.
4. Central office administrators responsible for schools, curriculum, and planning expected action plans to be focused, in particular, on the improvement of student learning.
5. Central office administrators responsible for schools, curriculum, and planning expected principals to develop action plans using a process that involved staff, parents, community, and students in decision-making.
6. Four central office administrators responsible for schools, curriculum, and planning described the direction of the approach to alignment between the district and schools as downward, from the strategic plan to the action plan.

Principals' Perceptions

Two of the subsidiary questions guiding this research were how principals characterize the alignment of school action plan goals to district strategic goals and objectives, and in what sense principals perceive school action plan goals and activities to be related to district strategic goals and objectives. This sub-section reports the results of this research with respect to these questions.

Perceived Planning Influences. Planning at the school-site is perceived to be influenced by variables that principals recognize and must take into account as they provide leadership for their schools and communities. Principals described 15 perceived influences on planning activities. Table 14 displays the perceived influences mentioned during interviews with principals. Central office administrators added a sixteenth, shared decision-making. Four of the 16 perceived influences, strategic plan, central office, standards and assessment, and curriculum adoptions, are described extensively below because interviewees devoted greater interview time to them. Sources of perceived influences mentioned by all principals included teachers, parents, and standards and assessment. Perceived influences mentioned by more than half the principals included the central office, strategic plan, the needs of students, educational design programs (e.g., Atlas, Alliance), the state's student learning improvement grant program, and curriculum implementations.

Curriculum implementations, although an aspect of perceived central office influence, were described by four principals and other interviewees separately from other perceived central office influences, and therefore were coded separately during the analysis. The perceived influences are described separately below, and in the order they are listed in Table 14.

Strategic plan. Some principals described the strategic plan as an influence on the planning process. Not all viewed the plan as particularly influential in their processes, however. Nor did the principals describe the plan in as much depth or with as much engagement as aspects of the central office influence, the standards and assessment influence, or the curriculum adoption influences.

Table 14

Planning Influences Perceived by Principals

	School							
Type of Influence	RHE	VE	PE	EE	VJH	EJH	SJH	Total
Strategic plan		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
Central office		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6
Students needs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	5
Teachers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	7
Parents	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	7
Standards and assessment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	7
Educational designs	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		5
SLIBG grant		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		5
Curriculum		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	5
State policies					Yes	Yes		2
School administration		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			4
Community needs							Yes	1
Beliefs of school staff						Yes	Yes	2
Colleagues' views							Yes	1
Bargained agreement						Yes		1
Shared decision-making								0

The principals' descriptions were structural in nature; that is the principals conveyed a sense of routine, or habitude, to the manner in which the plan influenced their school action planning. For example, at Valley Elementary the principal indicated that he felt the school received more resources by attending to the plan, and that he and the staff used the plan as a road map:

> .... it's easy for the buildings to be aligned with the district, ... we have to match. They have a set of goals and we have to indicate what goal we're working towards that fits in this district strategic plan. [Sam, 19980610]

At Panorama, the principal viewed the plan's influence in a more hierarchical and policy sense, describing the "top-down" relationship of the National Alliance to state, district, and school levels as well as the principal's role in fulfilling the directions set by the school board:

> Being a fairly sequential sort of individual [laughs], it's useful to me to ... we're being told by our school board and by our district that the strategic plan is what is running our school, and these are the things that the community and school and staff and school board have decided are the areas that we need to address. [Betty, 19970516]

At Vista Junior High, the strategic plan also was described by the principal in a hierarchical sense, but without the tie to the role of the principal in advancing the aims of the district.

> So, whatever we work on .... is always linked to the district strategic plan, although we approach it more specifically in terms of, "What kinds of things do we need to work on that are pertinent to this school?" [July, 19980819]

At Seascape Junior High neither the hierarchy nor the principal's place in the district structure was described within the context of the influence of the strategic plan. The existence of the strategic plan was more matter-of-fact in the relating, as was the nature of the plan's influence on the school action planning process and content. This principal, however, provided a view of the evolution of the action planning, in particular the simplification, that was consistent with the central office administrators' comments on this topic. Her comment also demonstrated an aspect of belief, or philosophy, with respect to her view of the nature of the strategic plan and its influence on principals' planning.

> .... our action plan is based on the needs of kids. This building looks at [the] strategic plan more as, sort of belief statement directions, more than specifics. [Cela, 19970516] Each year it's sort of gotten cleaner, and simpler, and a little more results directed, I think. [Cela, 19980623]

This philosophical aspect of the strategic plan was echoed later in the discussion about the perceived influence of junior high school staffs' beliefs on planning.

These four principals offered the greatest volume of commentary in describing the influence of the strategic plan on their action planning activities. The most common features of that perceived influence were (a) the mechanics of identifying which strategic plan goals and objectives were addressed by the action plan goals; (b) the association of resources to the priorities embodied in the strategic plan; (c) the hierarchical place of the strategic plan in the structure of national, state, and local priorities; and (d) the philosophical elements of the strategic plan's priorities.

Central office. Influence perceived to be exerted by the central office on the planning process was by far the most extensively described variable among the range of perceived planning influences. First and foremost, principals described the movement undertaken by the central office to develop student learning-related goals at the schools, and to emphasize the measurability of goal and objective statements. At Valley Elementary, for example, the principal described this change in two separate interviews, and emphasized at the same time the nature of the narrowing of resource availability.

> We have made a shift in this district and in this building away from teacher improvement and more toward student improvement..... The district is aligning their resources around this plan. [Sam, 19970522]

A description of narrowing the action plan content was added to this sense of narrowing the focus of resource availability. The principal described channeling effort away from certain types of goals the school staff might have liked to implement, in this case social goals, and toward more academically-oriented goals because he, and presumably his staff, determined the academic goals better fit the resource focus and the academic performance focus of the district's emphasis.

> I don't feel we have as much freedom to go where we want to go in an action plan, and in fact, in order to get the best bang for a limited amount of dollars, you end up having to coordinate it with what, the direction the district is taking. .... it makes some sense to coordinate it because then we can have it tap into district resources that are already in place. [Sam, 19980610]

The narrowing focus and alignment of resources around district emphases was reported to be influential at the junior high level as well. At Vista Junior High, the principal described her staff as finally coming to terms with the direction the district was taking and the meaning of resource availability for action plan goals and objectives that aligned with the central office's emphasis.

The central office administrators reinforced this emphasis on narrowing the schools' focus and establishing the expectation of specific priorities in the action plans: they clarified expectations that principals produce a particular action plan format through both statements and training focused specifically on action plan formats. An elementary and a junior high principal described this aspect of the influence of the central office. The elementary principal described the two-pronged nature of the change that included achievement and measurability from the elementary perspective.

> Student achievement, and it had to be measurable. That didn't sound like too much at all. Seemed like that fits into the realm of schools pretty

> well. But in some cases, that's not what our old action plans used to look like, particularly the measurability piece. So, we've become more data oriented in our action plan. [Sam, 19980610]

The junior high principal reinforced the "measurable outcomes" message was coming from the central office in a coordinated fashion by describing an experience where that aspect of the action plan format was emphasized during a principals' meeting.

These two principals reported to different central office administrators, indicating the "measurable outcomes" message was coming from multiple staff at the central office, including the assistant superintendents of elementary and secondary education. Two other principals, both at elementary schools, described the same "measurable outcomes" messages coming from the superintendent and the strategic planning director. Panorama's principal emphasized in particular the specific focus on student learning, saying the superintendent "has said to us a number of times, you know, the bottom line is, kind of, student achievement, and everything you do around it is supposed to improve student achievement" [Betty, 19970516].

Eastview Elementary's principal reinforced this view: the staff were described as being less than pleased with the influence of the central office staff on their planning. This principal noted in other comments that Eastview was a little late getting on board with the planning and curriculum emphases of the district, that the staff was a bit more "mature" and reticent. Nevertheless, his comments also indicated the participation of the strategic planning and staff development office in the action planning process, participation that was described to have occurred at several of the schools included in this study.

These principals reinforced the central office administrators' emphasis on student learning—on achievement that is measurable—in their focus on goals that were related to assessment. Two principals framed their perceptions of central office administrators' influence within the larger framework of assessment and accountability to the district's stakeholders, in particular parents and taxpayers. These influence themes emerged again in discussions of the influence of the state and the standards and assessment frameworks.

At Eastbay Junior High, the principal described the nature of the central office's influence on the planning process and resultant content through his description of the larger framework of planning and accountability. His account reinforced the central office's message of student learning and staff accountability for measurable improvement of student achievement. The picture he attempted to create for his staff set the influence in the larger frame of the influence of the state.

> .... what I've tried to do the last several years is always start with, "Well, this is where we know the state is with reform .... And this is where we know the district is as far as strategic plan and the district goals." And I try to make real clear, "These are the parameters in which we live, and what we're about is learning so we need to be thinking in terms of, over the next few months, we're gonna set some goals for next year, and they need to be involved with student learning. " .... I think we're held accountable to that. By the state, by the school board, by all ... [Jack, 19980609]

Two principals added another dimension to the resource concentration aspect of central office influence, identifying technology as a particularly significant resource emphasis in the district. Central office staff were responsible for schools' technology funding through the effort to establish and implement a voter-approved technology bond. The existence of technology improvement resources and the close relationship of technology to curriculum established for principals the importance of this influence, which is associated with the central office itself. At Panorama Elementary the technology-related influence was framed as linked to other perceived influences on the planning process, in particular curriculum and standards.

> So it seemed quite logical to all of us to pursue a goal in technology to, number one, bring all of our skills up to speed with the kind of equipment we just received, and also to do more with integrating technology into the regular curriculum, and also to decide if there are some technology standards that we should be attempting to achieve at the same time. [Betty, 19970516]

At Eastbay Junior High the technology-related influence was framed more as a capital bond accountability issue channeled through the central office.

In summary, the central office was more frequently mentioned and more fully described than was the influence of the strategic plan. Aside from the curriculum adoptions, which are described later, the district central office was perceived to have influenced the planning process and content through providing planning assistance and training resources to build capacity for planning processes; through influencing content through establishing resource priorities such as technology infusion; through demonstrating acceptable action plan format and content elements for principals; through emphasizing student learning-related goals, measurability, and accountability; and through consistency of messages from the superintendent's office and other central office administrators' offices regarding the district focus moving from teacher performance to measurable student performance.

Students' needs. The influence exerted by the needs of students was identified by principals in a broad sense. This general label, the needs of students, served as a banner signifying a variety of specifics more usefully coded in areas such as standards and assessments, educational designs, and curriculum. That is to say, the needs of students were converted by interviewees to more descriptive topics that served to parse and tag them in a manner more responsive to management. That did not, however, abate the energy associated with the staking of expansive emotional territory encompassing the broad value of student needs. From Seascape Junior High's perspective, the principal immediately answered questions about key influences on the planning process during two interviews, spaced a year apart, by identifying students' needs:

> First influence on how we plan are needs of kids. And that's .... programmatic, so, academic, and social needs .... activities, assemblies, all those things, too. [Cela, 19970516] Well, student need. I mean, that's basically what's always been our influence .... [Cela, 19980623]

River Hill's principal provided an elementary perspective, identifying the two most significant broad influences on planning. The first and foremost perceived influence was the needs of her school's students, followed closely by the needs of the teachers and support staff: "Student needs, staff needs; those are probably the two main forces" [Liz, 19970515]. This perspective was reinforced by Valley Elementary's principal, who broadly viewed the planning process as student-driven, regardless of the fact that students were not personally involved in the planning process. Valley's principal also echoed Seascape's view that the needs of the students in his school were not limited to academics alone.

These three principals represented the strongest voices with respect to nominating and describing students' needs as a key perceived influence on action planning. Nearly as much interview content was devoted to students as a perceived influence as was devoted to each of the next two perceived influences, teachers and parents.

Teachers. At junior highs, principals perceived teachers' influence to be exerted through the small groups trained in district-emphasized areas, particularly areas related to educational designs and methodologies, rather than content. At Vista Junior, teachers were perceived to influence the planning process from small group to the whole-staff level. At Eastbay Junior, the same perception of training-linked influence on planning was described as bridging the administrations of two principals. Those principals' similar perceptions highlighted both the interaction of staff members in the process and also their own task of focusing the efforts of staff. The first of the two principals interviewed at the school circumspectly described the general pervasiveness of the interest and stake in the outcome of action planning:

> Probably the most main force is the interaction with staff members, reading them, and getting them to participate with where we are. As far as primary ones, it always turns out, especially in a secondary building, the staff members are there. [Tab, 19970605]

One year later the Eastbay principal described specific results of a training program on the influence teachers exerted, and acknowledged the influence of teacher-leaders in goal setting: ".... the teachers who are naturally followed [by other teachers]. I mean I don't wanna say department heads or the official leaders, but we have some real strong people that the colleagues respect" [Jack, 19980609].

At the elementary schools, the strength of one individual or a few individuals was more often described to be influential than was the case at junior high schools. At Panorama an elementary language arts specialist was credited by the principal as a driving force in the development of the action plans. The teacher's subject area strength and ability to pull together other teachers and parents served as a synergistic force. Otherwise, the influence again was diffused throughout the teaching staff.

At Valley Elementary, the principal described his perception of the influence of the teachers in their roles as department heads, particularly in the year preceding the planning cycle examined in this research. And during this planning year, the emphasis was again on the broader staff participation in the decision-making. The department heads still remained influential in the process, but the larger debates and the priority-setting occurred in the staff meetings.

At River Hill a team of three teachers provided more of the influence on the process than any one faculty member or the traditional department heads. Influence was described as primarily through committees and participating in educational design training. At this school the staff participated broadly and earnestly in the planning process through the staff meetings. So River Hill's principal, like Eastview's and Valley's, and the junior highs', did not perceive planning influence to be located in individual staff, rather it was located in groups of teachers holding department head or committee chair positions and in the staff assembled.

Teachers were anticipated to influence the content of action plans and process by which planning occurs, but not the manner in which this occurs. The perceived influence of teachers in action planning took on a multi-dimensional character. Teachers' influences on planning was described as being exerted in both large and small group settings. Infrequently teacher influence was accorded to individuals. Influence appeared to be managed by principals through team involvement in training activities, particularly those sponsored by the district's staff development program.

Parents. Parental influence in school action planning varied from school to school. Principals perceived high and low influence paralleling differences described in "Planning Participants." At Eastview Elementary and Vista Junior High the principals acknowledged parents were not involved in the planning process at all during the year, and did not indicate the existence of parent influence on the process. At Eastview, the principal described parental participation as required for the state-mandated planning process surrounding school improvement funds. Otherwise, he viewed them as an over-surveyed group that wanted educators to leave them alone. The Vista Junior principal described an "open house" setting where parents could view what the planning process looked like or see the results of the plans.

At the other five schools, parents were perceived by principals to be influential in planning. Their repeated involvement in large group processes at three of those five, Valley Elementary and Eastbay and Seascape Junior Highs, developed both goal suggestions and priority setting involvement. At Eastbay the former principal described influential aspects of parental participation. His view was that the broad range of socioeconomic characteristics within the parental community developed a significant variety of expectations, which found their way into the school' plans. How parents specifically influenced the content of plans at Eastbay was explained by his successor. He described his approach to involving an extensive range of parents as contributing to the favorable reaction parents accorded the process and their willingness to contribute to priority-setting. This principal held open parent meetings and led the attendees through forced choice exercises to develop parent priorities for the school.

At River Hill and Panorama parents were perceived to exert influence through committee participation, and also through attendance at school staff meetings at River Hill. At both schools parents provided both action plan development input and decision-making input in these settings. River Hill's principal described an example of what parents preferred, emphasizing that the school's response to parent preferences created parental acceptance of the action plan goals (called strategies there).

> I mean there's parent input in that they participate in the process. And I think they are happy that we're using data as opposed to just some nebulous ... like for example, this year one of our strategies to reach our reading comprehension goal was that every teacher would teach the new reading adoption. Parents like that kind of strategy. [Liz, 19980618]

Parental influence within Panorama's committees persuaded staff to accept the principal's emphasis on needing technology changes. Parents also influenced the entire community involvement thrust found in Panorama's goal set.

> And also in technology, we had several parents on the technology committee that was, that were also very much in favor of abandoning the old Josten's program, and starting to do things ... And they were very, very supportive of doing that. [Betty, 19980615]

In addition to the variety of perceptions regarding parent influence, this aspect of the data demonstrated differences in the way schools went about channeling parental involvement. The junior high schools did not involve parents in inside-the-school committee work, short of that required for the SLIBG plan development. At two junior highs the principals served as the primary emissary to the parents and therefore the conduit back to the school; at the third parents were not involved in planning, nor perceived to exert influence on the plan content. At three of the four elementary schools parents were perceived to influence action plan goals significantly. At two of those three the parents were extensively involved in committee work and were perceived to exert influence on the planning outcomes. At the third they exerted influence through formal PTA meetings at which the principal and some teaching staff attended.

Standards. It didn't matter which of the four elementary school offices one entered to meet with an interviewee, there were always student work samples stapled on bulletin boards, taped on counters, posted on walls. When stepping up to the counter to sign in as a guest at River Hill, a graph displaying students' progress toward performance improvement goals greeted visitors from among the posted announcements and the student handiwork. Visible attention to goals was reflected in several of this principal's comments regarding the main forces she perceived to have influenced River Hill's action plan content. She described assessment analysis as extensive:

> We looked at all of the assessment data that we have currently and the area of need, or the highest area of concern was in math..... So then we looked at the ... which was actually on the WASL test, the 4th grade WASL test. We looked at the math area and, specifically, and it was very low. And so we set, that's the area that we chose to focus our goal..... What drives our action plan is our ... the last three years it's been our building assessment. [Liz, 19980618]

The importance of the state-wide assessments to the content of the action plans adopted by the elementary school principals was underscored by Panorama's principal. She personalized the strong message she perceived receiving from the school district's superintendent: the most important thing to focus on was the measurable improvement in student learning. During her first interview the principal drew a succinct verbal picture of her perception of the direct line of influence from the state's standards to the district's standards to action planning at Panorama.

> [The superintendent] has said to us a number of times the bottom line is student achievement, and everything you do around it is supposed to improve student achievement. And so, we've tried to start thinking in those terms now, in the last couple of years..... The math standards for Southcoast and also the essential learnings for the state influenced our planning greatly. And, so the standards influenced our planning greatly. [Betty, 19970516]

At Valley Elementary the principal expanded upon the nature of the influence he perceived standards and assessment had upon action planning. His perceptions about the effect of assessments upon action planning grew more focused between the first and second interviews. First, he emphasized the shift from emphasis on teachers learning how to teach using the Six-Trait method to evidence that students were learning through teachers' use of the Six-Trait method. During the second interview, he focused on what he perceived to be the significant effect the state assessment was having on his planning.

> I gotta tell you that the assessments that the state has put into place have affected our planning process. We're giving some thought to where we're falling in the WASL continuum and it only makes sense to address areas of need as pointed out by WASL. .... But that's a driver. [Sam, 19980610]

The Eastview principal's perception was very similar, however, he characterized the nature of the influence somewhat differently, at least initially. He perceived that his staff wasn't picking up on the importance of the state assessment program, particularly as he worked with his building's goals committee during the year prior to this study. His description of the standards and assessments influence became sharper during the period between the two interviews. During the second interview, he did not hesitate to go further than the interview question asked about influences on planning, identifying his view of the priority of influence. He also offered that his staff had developed some pride-related motivation given the public prominence of the WASL scores.

> So probably the WASL, if I were to prioritize, is the number one driving force. .... Their own desire to see us actually show better results on the scores that are published in the newspaper, but also to verify that the kids are making progress. [Don, 19980603]

The junior high principals also perceive the state standards and assessment program to be influential on their planning. Reactions to the same question on action planning influences produced less focused answers from two of the three junior high principals. The Seascape principal described clearly how the staff was working with the state standards and tying their planning to the essential learnings and the performances that would be expected of her school's students.

> Our action plan or area of focus had to do with standards and assessment. .... Teachers taking the new standards document that came from the district. The district standards, benchmarks, becoming familiar with them, linking curriculum to them, and writing what we call a connections worksheet or standard driven units. .... that was our main goal. [Cela, 19980623]

At Eastbay Junior High, the principal devoted time and detail to answer action planning influence questions. His response was similar to the more extensive answers offered by five other principals (excluding Vista Junior) during their second interviews. Eastbay's principal described both his perception of the top-down nature of the influence, as well as activities in which the staff and he were engaged in drawing connections from the EALRs to the district to the school.

> I think the standards one is a genuine [force in planning]. I think to begin with, it was a top down forced thing, legislated thing. But, the smart teachers, the ones that are the leaders, they see the good in it and they .... I don't think it's that way anymore, I think it's coming from within now. [Jack, 19980609]

The principal interview data indicated that, in the view of principals, the Washington State standards and assessment program exerted significant influence on their action planning. At each school the impact of the state's essential academic learning requirements, coupled with the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) program was described and indicated to be an important, if not the foremost, influence on action plan contents. In two instances principals indicated that they perceived the standards and assessment structured as the number one influence on their schools' planning. However, in two instances principals' answers were vague about standards and assessment as an influence. At Eastview, the principal indicated that he actually carried the burden of influencing the action plan in the direction of including a school action plan goal. At Vista Junior the principal did not discuss the influence of standards and assessments in any detail. But in every school, action plans during the year studied for this research, or during one or more of the two years prior, contained goals specifically addressing some aspect of the state standards and assessments.

Educational designs. Five principals offered perceptions about the influence of educational designs on their planning. At River Hill, the principal described the teacher training support provided by the National Alliance as particularly valuable in building capacity to integrate assessment, goals, and activities in their planning processes. She obtained a significant grant to assist River Hill in those activities.

> We've been a National Alliance School for the last four years, and we've gotten greater amounts of money to use for our reform movements than other elementary schools in the district. [Liz, 19970515] Probably the biggest help to our staff personally has been the training that we've gotten from the Alliance on how to as ... how to look at our assessment, how to find the areas of concern that come out of the assessment and how to set goals and design strategies. [Liz, 19980618]

Panorama's principal described the influence she perceived the Alliance had upon her staff's formulation of goals.

> So, we took the strategic plan, which by the way follows very closely with the work that the Alliance is doing and that sort of thing, so we took that and then from that formulated our own goals to fit the strategic plan. [Betty, 19970516]

At the junior high level the educational designs embraced by the central office administrators also were perceived influential on the planning products. Vista Junior High's principal reinforced the interrelationship of the Alliance design with other aspects of planning, and also described the hierarchical relationship between the state, educational designs, and local plans. But not all of the principals who mentioned educational designs during the interviews perceived supportive influence. Two of five indicated educational designs are not, or are negatively, influential in action planning. At Eastview the principal worked with staff not accepting any of the educational designs.

> Our school, our staff, has not aligned itself with any of the, with the Alliance, or the Atlas model for school reform. 306 We looked at [the] Audrey Cohen model, said, "No." [Don, 19970605]

In summary, principals described three perspectives on the influence of educational designs in their school-level planning. The Alliance was the design most often referenced by interviewees, although others were indicated as available. Three of the four elementary principals viewed the Alliance to be helpful and supportive. The fourth wasn't inclined to pursue any design. Vista Junior's principal referenced the Alliance training as a helpful resource in developing her staff. Seascape's never mentioned the Alliance or any educational design. And Eastbay's perceived the influence on action planning to be of importance, but not a positive force.

SLIBG grant. Principals perceived the SLIBG grants as influential in their planning processes and outcomes. Repeatedly principals described how, over the past two years, they have folded their SLIBG planning into their action planning. During the first interview with Valley Elementary's principal, he described the school's action planning process, and then re-characterized it as synonymous with the grant planning process. His description substantiated what had been said during an interview with Panorama's principal, and reinforced that receptivity to central office administrators' urging to simplify action plans and blend multiple school plans into the action plan.

During the first set of interviews with principals, both elementary and junior high school principals described the blending of the action planning process, the SLIBG planning process, and the use of the SLIBG funds and district staff development funds to support their action plan goals. Eastbay Junior's principal explained that the resources provided by SLIBG and staff development funds provided flexibility in goal setting that otherwise would not exist, especially given how much of the budget must be devoted to non-employee related costs. This resource impact on the budget and the action plan was reinforced by other junior high principals.

The SLIBG was also described as an aligning factor in the planning process. For example, Vista Junior's principal described the SLIBG planning by describing the linkage she perceived needed to exist among the grant funds, the action plan, and the district's strategic plan. She particularly emphasized that the combination of these resources and the alignment of the goals they support with the district's plan were necessary to leverage her junior high's ability to get things done.

> So, whatever we work on, and that includes the SLIBG grant money and so on, is always linked to the district strategic plan, although we approach it more specifically in terms of, "What kinds of things do we need to work on that are pertinent to this school?" We would not, we don't choose goals for ourselves that don't fit. Things don't get done that way. [July, 19980819]

The SLIBG funds and plan requirements were perceived by principals to be influential in their planning processes and the eventual content of those plans. Although one elementary school did not involve parents in the planning process during the planning cycle under study in this research, the resource incentive was described by principals to influence how they went about action planning, and the kinds of goals and the purpose of those goals. Even at the single elementary school which did not include parents in the process, the staff development and student learning focus of the goals related to the SLIBG requirements was similar to the focus of other schools. Aspects of the perceived influence were the involvement of parents, the focus on staff development, the emphasis on student learning improvement, and that multiple planning processes needed to blend and align with the strategic plan.

Curriculum. One of the four influences most-discussed by principals was the curriculum adoption decisions made in the school district. Curriculum adoptions were determined by a combination of teachers, school administrators, and central office staff including administrators and support staff, and eventually the school board through a district-wide process. Once a curriculum program change was established, schools were expected to implement the change throughout the district. The central office staff set aside funds to pay for instructional materials for the schools. Central office staff development resources were employed to assist with the implementation.

Principals viewed curriculum adoptions as influential in their planning. Curriculum adoptions had to be considered during their planning processes, and served as an issue during their discussions with staff. It was difficult to separate the notion of the curriculum as a potential influence from the central office as an influence. The blending of factors perceived to be influential was demonstrated during an interview with Valley Elementary's principal, who interrupted his flow of thinking with a clarifying comment: "I talk about district direction, I meant curriculum direction" [Sam, 19980610].

Two major curriculum projects were described by principals: language arts and math implementations. Implementations were often described as influencing action plan decisions, budget decisions, teacher training, parent involvement and training, and student achievement. Implementations were described as influencing planning and resource allocations at successive levels in the district's schools, as children advanced through the system. Vista Junior's principal described the influence from her perspective:

> Everyone's focusing on the same thing. All the teachers are going to learn what's called the Six-Trait writing process. How we teach kids to look at

> their own writing, and to examine it for certain qualities that should be there. .... That information also flows up to us from the elementary schools, 'cause kids there have been trained, and the teachers have been trained in that process. [July, 19970604]

Principals of two of the elementary schools closest to Vista Junior High, Valley Elementary and Panorama, also described the language arts and the math curriculum implementations as being influential in their planning and their decision-making. Panorama's principal described, in particular, the need to implement the Six Traits and First Steps programs in her elementary school's planning of selected language arts program elements. Valley Elementary's principal added a perspective on the influence of the math adoption. His view was that his school felt keenly the impact upon their planning latitude of the large scale introductions. He also described the assistance that such resource infusions provide for schools staffs to implement change while conserving school-specific resources, or leveraging school-specific resources, i.e., discretionary resources allocated to individual schools.

In essence, whether or not viewed by the principals as an influence on the content of school action plans separate from the central office influence, curriculum adoptions and implementations were described as influential in the goals they, their students' parents, and staff members selected as priorities for their schools. As noted earlier in the section describing the influence of state standard and assessments, the curriculum adoptions in the school district are not established in a vacuum. The state's essential academic learning requirements are linked to the district's curriculum choices. However, some principals view state influence distinctly from central office and curriculum change influences.

State policies. Three principals specifically identified the policies of the state of Washington as an influence on their action planning. It was evident from answers to other questions that all of the principals implicitly perceived the influence of state policies to affect their planning. The preceding sections addressing standards and assessments, school improvement grants, and curriculum implementations contained references to these relationships. However, three of the junior high school principals specifically named the influence exerted by the state as an explicit influence on how and what their schools planned.

Both Eastbay Junior High principals described their perceptions of the alignment of the school district's policies with those of the state, the inevitable impact on school planning, and the complexity of the situation. One indicated distaste for constricting choices available to educators at the local level, and the shift he perceived in the district's role in between the state and the individual school.

> I think the standards [influence] is a genuine [influence]. I think to begin with, it was a top-down forced thing, legislated thing. .... I think district planning has really been bypassed these days. We're working directly for the state now, and the state EALRs are there. [Jack, 19980609]

He drew a direct link from the state's standards to the district curriculum to the expectations of implementation at his junior high school, positing that, "If I was a curriculum director, I'd be saying that we have taken the state standards and we have written our own district curriculum that matches the standards, and we're expecting that those be taught at the building" [Jack, 19980609].

The state's influence could also be found in other aspects of the school's planning, or conversely in the lack of attention to areas of planning that were disregarded as fruitless. Examples included the structure of the school day, which the state prescribes to the minute; the structure of the school year, which the state prescribes to the day; and the composition of the workforce, which the state regulates through certification.

School administration. The principals, and assistants at the junior highs, were identified as participants in all the schools (see the *Planning Participants* section). The influence principals exerted varied by school, but displayed four distinguishable facets: planning preparation, planning process influence, plan content influence, and buffering.

The first method of influence was associated with the descriptions of the education designs and district staff development resources. Principals arranged for staff to attend workshops that they believed would produce change in skills and attitudes of teachers, or that addressed needs they perceived in their schools, or that were politically desirable to attend. The content and process influences were described more directly by the principals, though, and the majority of this section is devoted to those influences.

The latter role, buffering, was introduced as a separate element by the principal of Eastview Elementary, who also apologized for what he inferred to be a resistance toward change at his school: "I think the staff has felt pressure from the district and didn't like it. And so I felt my role was to buffer that a bit and I think the district has allowed that" [Don, 19980603]. Although he introduced it as a stand-alone topic, this buffering role also was described by other principals (or their staffs), even if in different fashions. As part of this role, principals acknowledged the influence they exerted on content or process as a conduit for the central office's influence.

At two junior high schools, principals emphasized their influence guiding the process. At Eastbay Junior, the principal described a significant responsibility not to permit the school staff, primarily teachers, to deviate from what he perceived to be very important—if not required—aspects of the action plan content. Vista Junior's principal views her role as focusing teachers' informal assessments of needs so that specific goals are defined. She views planning as an administratively-driven process rather than one in which teachers invest or exercise primary leadership.

> .... as a principal I have to really force people to set forth some things ... to keep going with the process because they don't care about it. .... So, it wouldn't cross their scanners to put it down as a goal and tie the money to it, or the resources to it and then go for it. Teachers don't think like that. So, it's more of an administrative, organizational thing that is my responsibility to get it kind of coherent and on paper .... [July, 19980819]

Her comments combine focus on process with attention to content. This perception of her influence on the action plan development was similar in these respects, process and content, to both principals at Eastbay Junior and Panorama Elementary. At Panorama, the principal emphasized content. Her influence focused upon what she perceived to be a glaring instructional need at her school rather than upon catalyzing teachers' issues, or keeping the content from straying from the district's requirements. Her comments were pointed with respect to directly influencing the content of the action plan, and indicated there was a price to pay for the explicit nature of the influence.

> I just looked at what we were doing [in technology] and it just was wrong. It was just wrong. We should have been doing more. And the more I looked at it, the more I became discouraged with what it was that our kids were doing. .... It didn't allow for anything that I thought was valuable in the area of technology learning. So, a lot of that came from me, and that was a difficult one because there was a ton of resistance on the staff towards it. [Betty, 19980615]

In summary, at the junior high level, Eastbay's principal perceived the purpose of his influence as a need to keep the teachers from disregarding the district's requirement of a student learning focus. Vista's worked to guide teachers toward identifying and focusing on their local needs. Seascape's worked her constituencies to broker the highest needs for students as seen by the community, parent, and teacher groups. She described her role to be a form of shuttle diplomacy between teams, parent groups, community, and her peers.

At the elementary level, the Eastview principal's focus was influencing his staff to understand and accept the role of the district, and to exemplify through his behavior the assessment emphasis he desired his staff to accept. Valley's never described directly the manner in which he perceived himself to influence the content, but did describe the need to align resource sources for the most valuable result in the school. He also described exerting influence on the implementation rather than the process or content, specifically indicating he thought it best not to lead in the planning committee efforts.

River Hill's principal completely omitted describing her role in influencing the planning process and content. Her influence was exemplified by the resources she acquired surrounding the planning process, in particular the selection of staff for training, emphasis on measurable outcomes, and acquiring mission-specific resources for the school. Her success in acquiring resources and gaining parent commitment to changes was the one example of total shared decision-making involvement described by the district's planning director. Finally, Panorama's influence became the most visible through her own description. She was the only principal to identify duty to the district and a compelling technology need as reasons to exert the influence she described.

Community needs. The community surrounding a school, as a constituency distinguished from parents of students who live and may work in the community, was explicitly considered an influence on action planning at only one school, Seascape Junior High. At Seascape, the use of the physical plant by the community at large and the integration of service-learning into the curriculum, the needs of the community were expressly contemplated in the action planning process.

> .... because of the tremendous use of the facility, I would say community, needs of community. And because of our ninth grade breakout project,

> which is community-based—all of our students spend up to 40 hours of volunteer work somewhere—that community piece is real; we need to take a look at that always each year when we do our planning. [Cela, 19970516]

There was also evidence that community involvement with students was a significant part of Panorama Elementary's action plan goal set. However, the community's needs, as distinguishable from the students' needs that may be met by community involvement, were not described as influential in the action planning process or product.

Beliefs of school staff. Mission statements are a common element of institutional planning structures, an outcome of strategic planning processes (Conley, 1993), and were key documents sought under this study's document review protocol (see Appendix F). Mission statements were expected to be an influence on the planning process. In only two schools the mission statement, or a comparable document described as a statement of belief, were described as influential in planning. These instances were the only occurrences of school-wide belief systems being described by principals as planning influences. However, this perceived influence was described with such investment of emotion that it was distinguished in the process of data gathering and analysis.

At Seascape Junior High the beliefs of school staff were described as a philosophical approach to education interwoven with the planning of the school, and very closely tied to the school's standards and assessment program. At Eastbay Junior High, the staff's middle level philosophy was also described as an influential planning factor. The principal indicated, "We are much more driven by the middle level program, and staying true to it" [Tab, 19970605].

Colleagues' views. One of the influences expected to be identified during the planning process was that of teachers on other teachers. The views of teachers as colleagues was not mentioned specifically by either principals or teachers. However, the notion that some teachers were more influential than others was mentioned by the principal of Eastbay Junior High. And indicators of core groups of teachers influencing their peers were found at River Hill and Valley Elementary Schools.

Principals as a group were identified by one principal as a collegial influence in the planning process. Even though her description of the influence of principals on one anothers' planning was not repeated by other principals, it was a particularly important statement. She described the development by a cadre of principals of a specific goal to be implemented at all of the junior high schools in response to a strategic need: reading. In fact, the reading goal was found in each of the junior high school action plans reviewed for this study. It was the only goal identified at Eastbay Junior High.

> .... and particularly this year by unifying on the corrective reading focus. There was a lot of good discussion with the junior high principals. And just that an opportunity came up for some funding that wouldn't have to come out of our budget that was a need that we all had talked about. And so I would say more than ever in the past each of the junior high principals pushed that as a goal for their action plan. [Cela, 19980623]

Bargained agreements. The collective bargained agreements between the district and its various employee groups were expected to be an issue in the planning process, particularly with respect to implementing new and unusual approaches to student learning. Only one principal mentioned the teachers' bargained agreement. His reference was to its impeding the staff's ability to do something in the planning process.

The district and the teachers' association established a committee to approve waivers from the teachers' bargained agreement (required an 80 percent supportive vote of the teachers within a school). One high school requested and was granted a waiver for a new approach to scheduling classes. None of the principals identified such a waiver as a need or desire of the action planning process, nor did any teachers mention the need or the teachers' agreement as an impediment or support in planning.

Shared decision-making. From the perspectives of principals, shared decision-making as a discrete issue was not enough of an influence on the action planning process, or the content of action plans, to be mentioned. None of the principals described shared decision-making, or their buildings' models, as factors in the action planning process or the product of the process. All of the principals did describe, and the documents found at their schools demonstrated, use of shared decision-making processes in their action planning activities. Shared decision-making was identified in interviews as a planning factor by both central office administrators and the teachers' association representative. In all other respects, the variation between principals perceptions of influences and teachers and central office administrators' was unremarkable.

Planning Influence Hierarchy. Table 15 displays a method of organizing the separate planning influences described by principals, teachers, and central office administrators. Perceived planning influences are grouped by their source, or origin. Three levels of influence were identified during the discussions with interviewees: the state, the school district, and the school itself. The perceived influences are sorted hierarchically by those sources to organize the concept of perceived influences on action planning. This establishes a conceptual relationship for later analysis and discussion of perceived influences in chapter 5.

Plan Alignment. Principals' approaches to aligning school plans with district goals reflected the two approaches described in the central office administrators' descriptions of alignment. Table 16 displays the approach toward alignment practiced by the principal of each school as expressed during their interviews. Table 16 shows four of the seven principals, in describing their practices and views, practiced an upward alignment approach, perceiving their schools as the starting points. Three principals indicated they viewed and practiced alignment as a downward-oriented affair, with the district strategic plan as the starting point.

Table 15

Planning Influence Hierarchy

State	District	School
State policies	Strategic plan	Students needs
Standards and assessment	Central office	Teachers
SLIBG grant	Curriculum	Parents
	Educational designs	School administration
	Shared decision-making	Community needs
	Bargained agreement	Beliefs of school staff
		Colleagues' views

Table 16

Summary of Principal Responses to Plan Alignment

	School						
Action Plan Alignment	RHE	VE	PE	EE	VJH	EJH	SJH
Downward Alignment		X	X			X	
Upward Alignment	X			X	X		X

Several principals described their practices in terms implying both downward and upward activities, in which case detailed analysis of the nature and strength of their comments was conducted to assign an overall approach.

Upward Alignment. Two elementary school principals expressed differing views of their upward approach to connecting district directions and school actions. They described their efforts as being designed at the school first, and thereafter linked to the strategic plan. Neither of these principals described any downward-oriented practices or views during their interviews.

River Hill. The principal of River Hill explained her upward approach succinctly in response to an alignment question:

> [How do you use the district strategic plan in your action planning process?] We dummy it up. .... [Tell me what you mean by that?] If we have to have a goal, and it has to fit a certain area of the strategic plan, we make it fit. .... [So you figure out what the building needs are and then you go back and you retrofit the language to the plan?] Right. And maybe that's not a bad thing. .... it feels like it's a fake connection. .... this year I think, I feel like there's a more authentic connection because of the way we did it. [Liz, 19980618]

The consistency in this principal's view of her schools' approach to developing the action plan was demonstrated later in the interview, in response to a follow-up question about how, in her view, action planning was related to district planning.

> [In what senses is action planning related to district strategic planning?] Well, it's not. .... It's ... when we design our action plan, we do not consciously think about the district strategic plan in designing the action plan. It's an afterthought. After we've figured out what our needs are, we go back and connect it to the strategic plan. But the strategic plan does not drive our action plan. [Liz, 19980618]

Eastview. At one of the oldest elementary schools in the district, Eastview's principal expressed a view of alignment that added a different dimension to the upward approach. His notion of upward alignment included a general indifference toward the emphases of the district through the strategic plan. Instead, the principal focused upon how the district's structure could help his school meet its needs. This supplier-of-resources view was also advanced by a junior high principal who described upward alignment to include a "shopping the plan" characteristic; sort of cherry-picking among the strategic plan objectives to find one that supports what the school staff desires to accomplish.

Seascape Junior. The principal of one of the newest junior high schools in the district described her view of alignment, relating an upward approach with belief-driven rather than resource-driven characteristics.

> Well, obviously, we do an action plan that we present to the district that is linked with the strategic plan, so I suppose that would be the way the linkage comes there. But our action plan is based on the needs of kids. This building looks at strategic plan more as, sort of belief statement directions, more than specifics. .... I think some other buildings feel the plan is more directional on have-to's, ways they need to go. .... we devise where we think we need to go first, to meet the needs of kids, and then we tie it to the strategic plan, rather than the strategic plan telling us where we need to go. [Cela, 19970516]

Vista Junior. At Vista Junior High, the principal's approach was upward-oriented based upon her view that the strategic plan was really a very general sort of document that expressed important themes rather than district priorities for its schools. Discipline was a specific example of a priority identified by the staff and administration. She described how this priority hooked into an existing strategic plan objective (which she labels a "goal"), and the nature of linkage as fortuitous rather than intentional.

> So, for example, discipline is a goal of school district this year. It's simply a coincidence, because we've wanted to work on it and we think it's important for students' success in school to be knowledgeable of what the consequences are for violating some rules and what kinds of things are

> standards for the school. But, that's something we just picked because we were struggling with it. [July, 19980819]

Her approach to action planning was explained in further detail concerning her view of the general nature of the strategic goals and objectives. She answered the question, "How do you see action planning fitting with strategic planning?" with a description of the relationship as "quite broad and comprehensive, but not to the point where it doesn't have boundaries," and went on to say that the plan "covers almost everything that a school would need to focus on." This principal emphasized that the school's goals "can fit within the parameters of that very easily" [July, 19980819]. She expressed a view similar to comments made by another principal and three of the teachers interviewed for this study. All perceived that the strategic plan goal and objective statements were broad, and capable of supporting nearly any action plan goal a school could develop. This notion of imprecision was not limited to school administrators and teachers. That the strategic plan's terms could be viewed as too vague was also a concern for one central office administrator.

Downward Alignment. The perception that strategic plan components are vague did not necessarily act as a critical attribute for identifying the principal as a proponent of an upward alignment approach. Of the three principals identified as taking a downward alignment approach, one held similar views with respect to the general nature of the strategic plan elements.

Panorama. At Panorama the principal and a key teacher viewed the strategic plan goals and objectives as very broad. The principal explained that she worked diligently to ensure that her school's action plan flowed from the strategic plan. She acknowledged, though, that some schizophrenia exists in the alignment process, and this was apparent in some of her comments: "We do both because we look at the whole strategic plan and we say, 'This is what the district wants us to focus on, so let's see how our goals fit into it.' .... but they're so general, and they're so broad that if you're anywhere at all on track, you're gonna hit it" [Betty, 19980615]. The teacher separately acknowledged this general nature of the goals during her description of the alignment process. Her view of how other elementary school staffs go about the action plan development process was similar: "And again, in every elementary school it's different, but the goals are generically written in such a way that it would be hard to find something that wouldn't fit" [Ruth, 19980615].

Perceptions and worries about the general nature of the strategic plan goals and objectives notwithstanding, this principal and teacher provided a view of the alignment process that distinguished them from the upward alignment approach. Downward alignment was described by Panorama's principal in a fashion reflective of comments offered by the principals who described planning in a downward alignment fashion.

> ... we're being told by our school board and by our district that the strategic plan is what is running our school, and these are the things that the community and school and staff and school board have decided are the areas that we need to address. So, we took the strategic plan, which by the way follows very closely with the work that the Alliance is doing and that sort of thing, so we took that and then from that formulated our own goals to fit the strategic plan. [Betty, 19970516]

During her second interview, this principal elaborated on that characterization of a downward alignment approach to planning. She further described the nature of the downward approach through locating herself in the district hierarchy, noting how she believes in the need to return to the strategic plan for action planning guidance. She also identified the value of the planning work with respect to improving the school's resources. She also suggested colleagues at other schools use the strategic plan in a similar fashion based upon her conversations with them. Her notions of interrelatedness, hierarchy of goals, capitalizing on district resources, and needing not to "miss the boat" with respect to plan focus were themes that surfaced in other interviews with principals who described downward alignment approaches. These views emerged as characteristics of downward alignment, consistent with the central office administrators' perceptions of the need to develop consistency in the schools' directions.

Eastbay Junior. Another principal who described his alignment, rationale, and provided examples of a downward alignment approach to planning was at Eastbay Junior. He described going about the process of developing that alignment in the course of his work with constituent groups on the campus and in the parent community. His description of downward alignment characteristics began early in the interview as he related his approach to setting the stage for the action plan goal development process.

> And what I've tried to do the last several years is always start with, "Well, this is where we know the state is with reform and all the state things. And this is where we know the district is as far as strategic plan and the things that, the district goals." And I try to make real clear, "These are the parameters in which we live, ... [Jack, 19980609]

He emphasized finding student learning at the core of the action plan goals and activities, and the school's focus during the year, consistent with views expressed by other principals, central office administrators, and the superintendent. Eastbay Junior's principal took his rationale for this view a step beyond the district itself, and linked the school's action plan goal setting parameters to the goals set forth by the state.

Similar to the "my place in the organization" view expressed by Panorama's principal, this "expectation of implementation" language was one of the stronger statements by a principal indicating he or she took a downward-oriented approach to action planning. Eastbay Junior High's principal reinforced his concept of parameters for planning and allocating resources when he discussed the work he did with parents in goal setting. He established the boundaries for the work the school needed to accomplish in the coming year, providing a border within which he believed school plan development needed to focus.

Valley Elementary. The most conflicted description of alignment was found at Valley Elementary. The principal described a variety of reasons why action plan goals and activities must flow from the strategic plan goals and objectives. When the interview conversation included the relationship of the staff development and SLIGB plans, he carefully described the linking that he did, and that he viewed as necessary to do, to adequately focus scarce energy at the school. He also indicated the important expectation that action plans link to the strategic plan.

> They've required links—direct links—to what the buildings are doing to the district strategic plan. And, by direct links I mean the activi-, you can have a building goal that's great and wonderful, but what district goal is that, or district objective is that addressing?.... In my case, what I've tried to do is I've taken the district strategic plan and I've always kept that on the table in any of our planning processes .... [Sam, 19970522]

He demonstrated how the planning participants and he ensured the action plan aligned to the strategic plan goals by taking the district's strategic plan, listing their goals and activities, and then checking to determine if school goals fit. Goals that did not fit within the scheme of the strategic plan's priorities were abandoned. His description of action plan goal alignment segued into an extended description of what he characterized as the changing purpose of planning at the school level. He described what he perceived to be an associated diminution of the school's "local control" of planning. He expressed the view that action plans no longer are about "what" the school will adopt as a priority during the coming year, but rather about "how" the school will implement the "what" decisions made at the central office.

> District planning really directs building implementation ... I've mentioned this once before, but, some of the fundamental district decisions with regard to how they set up their goals really do direct buildings to take an approach. .... But what that means [laugh] is that part of the decisions we make is how we implement that program, not whether we implement it..... They're implementation decisions. They're not so much decisions about whether or not we do something, but it's a matter of "How should we go about doing this?" [Sam, 19980610]

His statements indicated a downward approach to action plan development. The importance of the central office direction themes found in this principal's descriptions of planning processes, planning influences, and action plan relationships to the strategic plan were associated with the a downward approach definition. In particular, his description of implementing what has been decided at the central office was indicative of the need, if not intent, to establish subordinate goals supportive of district direction.

Key Teachers' Perceptions

One of the key questions for this research was how key teachers involved in the planning process described developing and aligning school goals to district goals and objectives. Table 17 displays the percentage, by school, of sentences coded to action plan alignment approaches, summarizing the distribution of downward and upward alignment practices and preferences comments. Their comments are qualitatively described below.

River Hill Elementary. The downward alignment-oriented teachers' comments at River Hill focused upon technical aspects of the action plan development process. Two teachers' comments, in a fast-paced interchange on how they saw action planning fitting with district planning, exemplified their view on upward aspects of their linkage to the strategic plan.

Table 17

Key Teacher Perceived Alignment

	School						
Action Plan Alignment	RHE	VE	PE	EE	VJH	EJH	SJH
Downward	0%	61%	100%	53%	89%	80%	94%
Upward	100%	39%	0%	47%	11%	20%	6%

> Cleo: Well, our action plans have to align with the five strategic goals, don't they have to still fit into ... Charm: And we have to use a plan, that the district in fact uses. .... We have to use the same form they use. .... Cleo: Well, the district has five categories, high performance management, standards and assessment, and they have delineated, again by huge task group, and then our goals kind of fit into those areas. Liz has to literally block them in. [Charm et al, 19980611]

That "blocking in" reference was expanded later in the conversation, in a passage that demonstrated their description of the upward approach paralleled the principal's description of alignment. Three teachers discussed how they assisted with the generation of the school's action plan goals and activities, in an example of force fitting to develop the upward alignment to the strategic plan.

> Charm: You force it to fit. Cleo: Yeah. You force it. .... Charm: We make it fit, but then we say that the district plan, this is how you could help us accomplish this, really accomplish it, that piece isn't there yet. .... Honey: This is the way I look at it. What we do is, we looked at our data, separate from this [the strategic plan], we didn't have this. We looked at our data. We said, "What does River Hill need?" [Charm et al, 19980611]

Few examples of key teacher descriptions, save those offered by Valley Elementary staff, were as sharply pointed regarding the approach to action plan development.

Valley Elementary. At Valley Elementary, conversation in response to action plan development and linkage questions see-sawed back and forth between downward and upward orientations. Table 17 indicates that 22 sentences were coded "downward practice," and 14 were coded "upward practice." A teacher who assisted with the plan development process described the approach she perceived to be taken to development of action plan goals in a "downward practice" passage:

> The district has their goals—we have them on the wall right there—and all of our goals fit within the larger strategic goals of the district. So, they have their umbrella out first, and then we fit ours within that. .... First you have the larger district goals and then the sub-goals [objectives] from the district. So, it sets a framework. [Jane, 19980610]

Another teacher, responsible for a department's input and participation in the action planning process, provided another view of the practice of linking to the strategic plan. In this instance it was not development of action plan goals, but development of a district grant for program improvement. She described a downward approach-in-practice stimulated by resource allocation requirements of the central office. There were no references to retrofitting language or wordsmithing to adjust the application to specific portions of the strategic plan, just an example of a decision whether to proceed with program improvement based upon appropriateness under the strategic plan.

These key teachers' descriptions of practice were stronger with respect to the emphasis placed on the pre-eminence of the strategic plan in developing goals and grants than they were in the emphasis on developing goals Valley wanted without regard to the prominence of the strategic plan priorities. The department head offered, though, that the staff focused first on what the building needs were, but extended that to needing to develop action plan goals to qualify for school improvement grant funds.

The strength of the principal's and the staff's upward approach comments at Valley were nearly convincing with respect to characterizing the principal's approach as upward alignment. The weight of the details surrounding descriptions of how and why the staff, and the principal, adhered to the priorities within the strategic plan prior to, during, and in activities related to the action planning process tipped the analysis in favor of a downward alignment posture in practice.

Panorama Elementary. At Panorama nothing was offered by the teacher interviewee to indicate any approach other than downward alignment. Her description of practice at Panorama closely corresponded to her principal's. Responding to questions about the relationship of the action plan to the strategic plan, she offered:

> Well, all of what we do has to umbrella underneath that district plan. And so, it's directly related. .... It's directly related. I mean it, we couldn't choose anything that wasn't part of that plan, as I understand it. .... Well, the district plan supersedes, and so everything that we might select as an action plan, in some way has to fit under those specific goals and objectives. So, I've not heard, I mean, I can't even imagine choosing something that wouldn't fit .... [Ruth, 19980615]

She was another teacher who perceive the strategic plan language as so broad it covered most initiatives a school might want to undertake. She expanded her view to include the resource driver issue, particularly in the form of the SLIBG funding, then restated her view to assert that, although she did think planning necessarily ought to be downward-oriented, it was so in her experience: "I think in reality though, as people have become used to the idea ... and with state moneys and when SLIBG is—that's what's driving it— .... I think the reality is that it comes more top-down" [Ruth, 19980615]. Her views reinforced her principal's, strengthening the downward alignment designation for Panorama's approach to action planning.

Eastview Elementary. At Eastview the principal described his action planning approach from an upward alignment perspective. The teacher interviewed at Eastview described the process as occurring from both approaches in practice, but espoused an upward approach. In a description of the alignment approach to action planning, she responded to the question, "How do you use the district plan and strategic plan in the action planning process?" by describing the technical aspects of assembling the action plan form, and then moved from the district priorities to the local need in a recitation that included key attributes of what a downward approach would entail. The technical aspects of the form were then supplemented by a description of "cascading," which is a downward approach.

> Well, if I start with the district strategic plan goal. And you plug ... we started with that. And then we figured out how that would actually look in student performance. And then, what activities that the teachers do in the classroom, and get training, and how to effect that. .... So, you sort of start with the district goal, and then school, and then classroom, and then teachers. [Cat, 19980615]

At this point, she had indicated her view of action planning started both with the district strategic plan and the needs of the school. Then she described another example of the upward alignment approach-in-practice. Eastview's staff selected a plan priority:

> Well, as far as the staff meeting, they sort of chose the general goal of improving student math scores. Then when we got together we looked at the strategic plan. How would that fit there? And then, what does that look like in the classroom? [Cat, 19980615]

A clarifying probe evoked the approach she espoused for aligning action plans, which was an upward approach based again upon the local needs of the school's students. She indicated the district's "instructional strand about improving student performance" was probably what held the most concern for teachers, "But we didn't start with the strategic plan. We didn't look at that first. But, when we were doing our action planning, we were starting with student academic needs" [Cat, 19980615]. This teacher gave a textbook recitation of the "cascading" aspect of a downward alignment approach to action planning. However, the bulk of her comments were upward alignment descriptions of practice or her preferred approach. This supported the principal's description that Eastview followed an upward approach.

Vista Junior High. At Vista Junior teachers described their views of the alignment process as being more downward than upward in approach. Both teachers, who played key roles in the plan development process according to both the principal and them, described the practices as primarily downward in approach, but the result as upward. The teachers agreed in a view of how the relationship between the district plan and the school plan was arranged, one positing, "I would think the action plan feeds into the strategic goals. And the strategic goals are basically what the whole district is about" [Judy, 19980925]. The other teacher reinforced this practice description with her view of the way the alignment process ought to be approached.

> I think we try to avoid the [upward approach], but I'm not saying that that isn't there some of the time. But I think we really do try to strive for the [downward approach]. .... You know, it was like, "Okay. What is it we have to do to appease?" [Allie, 19981007]

This "get the district off our back" view was alluded to earlier in the interview with this teacher, who felt that that district should not be the driver in the planning process. The best situation, she said she believed, was where the influence of the district was secondary to the influence of the local school. The process these teachers and their principal described, the desire to be free from the district priorities, and the continued and consistent emphasis on climate, discipline, and schedule issues characterized an upward approach. This staff focused on issues they acknowledged as inconsistent with the priorities of the strategic plan. A difference between their upward approach and the tack taken by other principals and schools pursuing an upward approach was that there wasn't any evidence of an attempt to fit their goals to the strategic plan's objectives, either by wordsmithing or another tactic. They appeared more to ignore it than appease.

Eastbay Junior High. At Eastbay Junior the teachers were split in their view of the approach taken to develop an action plan. A department head who was part of the leadership team described her principal's approach and the resource motivation to taking a downward approach.

> .... I think right now the principal has made it clear to us that what we decide is important, if it's going to be supported with teacher planning time with money from the state, to give us time to work on those goals, it has to fit into the district plan. .... And you can't use that SLIBG money for something that's not, one of your goals that doesn't fit into the district plan. So, in that way, you do have to be careful of what you plan. And that SLIBG money is crucial. .... We use it [the strategic plan]. Only because our funding is directly related to it. [Dannel, 19980609]

The action plan submitted by Eastbay Junior contained only one goal: "To increase the Reading level by 1 1/2 grade levels, of 80% of our 7th grade students diagnosed at 5th grade level or below." One of the goals submitted by Seascape Junior was: "To increase the Reading level by 1 1/2 grade levels of 80% of our students diagnosed at 5th grade level or below." The third junior high, Vista Junior, submitted a similar goal: "Inservice of special education department in reading (accelerated reader grant money)."

This indicated support for the principal's view that the nature of the alignment approach at Eastbay Junior was downward rather than upward.

Seascape Junior High. Little interview content from Seascape Junior addressed a downward approach by the principal or the staff. The principal acknowledged the import influence of the resources available through the district as a factor in the school's action plan development, but emphasized repeatedly the importance of the needs of students at that school as where all of the planning started. The most downward oriented practice described by a very verbal teacher (hence the number of sentences coded to a downward approach, but with little substance regarding practice specifics) portrayed the manner in which the principal used the strategic plan with teachers in the needs development process she had described. He shared the principal's use of the plan, which was limited to making sure teachers had a copy of it at the outset of planning.

At the same time, he was not at all willing to say that the strategic plan was a starting point for the school's planning activities: ".... I'm not sure I'd call it a starting point or a background point. It's information that you need to have to be consistent with the district's plans" [Jack, 19980623]. He added a note of disconnection between the plans, saying, "I'm not aware of a formal connection [between the strategic and action plans], but again, we have information available to us, and we know we've got it available to us at all times" [Jack, 19980623].

This teacher expressed the belief that the approach that should be taken is to consider what is to be taught, and be comfortable in the knowledge that the strategic plan is covering your priorities as a teacher. He devoted very little substance to describing specific aspects of planning at Seascape that fit a downward alignment approach. But what he did describe, and indicated he believed, supported the principal's upward approach to planning that focused on the perceived needs of the students first, and the district priorities second.

Action Plan Contents

The action plans developed at the seven schools for the 1998-99 school year varied in number, focus, construction, and content. Appendix P, School Action Plan Goals 1998-99, displays the actual content of the goals contained within each school's action plan and are numbered for reference to the descriptive tables in this chapter.

Action Plan Goal Characteristics

One of the subsidiary research questions guiding this study was whether there were significant differences between the action plan goals and activities created by principals who described an upward versus a downward approach to action plan alignment. Before assessing the relationship to principals' approaches, it was necessary to establish a set of structural characteristics to be labeled for the relationship analysis. The literature reviewed for this research did not contain a process or model for establishing operational plans. Nor was there a model for assessing operations plans, per se.

To construct criteria for labeling action plan characteristics, three authorities on strategic planning were reviewed for tactical plan characteristics (Kaufman, 1995; Mauriel, 1989; Steiner, 1979). Five definitions synthesized from the three authors' descriptions were developed into summary labels (see Appendix M). To this list of five characteristics was added the central office criteria of goals focused on improvement of student learning.

1. Growth: Involve some stretching; not too easily reached; a baseline is established.
2. Linked: Consistent with organizational strategies; must support the mission.
3. Measurable: Observable; concrete, quantifiable over time; scale criteria used.
4. Specific: Understandable; what is to be accomplished simply and accessibly stated; specific time parameters.

Table 18

Action Plan Goal Content Characteristics Analysis

		Action Plan Goal Content Characteristics Coding				
School Name and Action Plan Goal No.[a]		Student	Growth	Measure	Specific	Standard
River Hill Elementary	#1	X	X	X	X	X
Valley Elementary	#1	X			X	
	#2	X				
	#3	X	X	X	X	X
	#4				X	
Panorama Elementary	#1	X	X	X	X	X
	#2			X	X	X
	#3	X	X	X	X	X
Eastview Elementary	#1	X	X	X	X	X
	#2	X	X	X	X	
Vista Junior High[b]	#1				X	
	#2				X	
	#3					
	#4					
Eastbay Junior High	#1	X	X	X	X	X
Seascape Junior High	#1	X	X	X		
	#2	X	X	X	X	X
	#3	X	X	X	X	X

[a] See Appendix P for action plan goal numbering and verbiage.

[b] No activities were included in the action plan document provided to the researcher; no formal action plan was submitted to the central office as of October 1.

5. Standard: Flexible, modifiable; who or what will demonstrate accomplishment; methods for assessing; conditions under which accomplishment will be observed.
6. Student: Goal focused upon the improvement of student learning.

Table 18 displays results of the action plan goal analysis on the above goal characteristics, except for linkage. Table 18 demonstrates variability in characteristics of the goals adopted by the schools.

Schools with the fewest goals, River Hill, Eastview, and Eastbay Junior High, adopted goals which contained all of these goal characteristics. Vista Junior High adopted the greatest number of goals, but with the fewest goal characteristics. No single characteristic was found in all goal statements.

Relationships to the Strategic Plan

Another key study question was whether there is an association between schools' action plans and the strategic plan goals and objectives. All the school's action plan goals were analyzed to determine how many strategic plan goals and objectives were linked to the action plan goals. Each action plan goal's verbiage (as well its subordinate activities) was examined for words and phrases that described a strategic plan-related aspect of that goal's aim. For example, Valley Elementary's first goal, "to continue to implement and improve strategies for student learning through the integration of technology in the classroom," aimed to implement technology in an integrated fashion in the school's classrooms. Objective 3 of Goal 2 of the strategic plan established that schools were "to continue to implement and improve strategies for student learning through the integration of technology in the classroom." This action plan goal aimed to implement that objective of the strategic plan, and therefore linked the action plan to the strategic plan. Its subject as a goal was, in essence, technology.

Table 19

Action Plan Goal Linkage to Strategic Plan

		Action Plan Goals, Goal Subjects, and Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives Linkage		
School Name and Action Plan Goal No.[a]		Action Plan Goal Subject	Number of Strategic Plan Goals	Number of Strategic Plan Objectives
River Hill Elementary	#1	Math	3	5
Valley Elementary	#1	Technology	3	4
	#2	Community	2	2
	#3	Writing	2	4
	#4	Math	2	2
Panorama Elementary	#1	Technology	1	2
	#2	Community	1	3
	#3	Writing	4	5
Eastview Elementary	#1	Spelling	3	4
	#2	WASL	3	3
Vista Junior High	#1	Discipline	2	2
	#2	Training	1	1
	#3	Training	1	1
	#4	Training	2	1
Eastbay Junior High	#1	Reading	2	3
Seascape Junior High	#1	Quality	2	4
	#2	Responsibility	3	4
	#3	Reading	2	3

[a] See Appendix P for action plan goal numbering and verbiage.

Table 19 displays the results of the analysis of each action plan goal vis-à-vis each strategic plan objective. The numbers of strategic plan goals and objectives addressed by each school goal are listed. For example, River Hill's single goal was math.

The content of the goal linked to three of five strategic plan goals, and five of fifteen strategic plan objectives subordinate to those three strategic plan goals. The strategic plan objectives identified as linked with each school action plan goal were not necessarily consistent with the strategic plan objectives identified by the schools; schools' published linkages were not a basis for this analysis.

Tables 20 and 21 display results of action plan goal linkage analysis according to the alignment approach taken. The number of linkages to each strategic plan objective addressed by each upward approach school's action plan goals was summed and displayed in Table 20. The number of linkages to each strategic plan objective addressed by each downward approach school's action plan goals was summed and displayed in Table 21. The seven schools studied for this research addressed 13 of the 24 strategic plan objectives in their action plans. Eleven of the strategic plan objectives were not addressed by any of the schools. Strategic Plan Goal 3 was not addressed by any school.

Table 20

Action Plan Upward Approach Linkage to Strategic Objectives

	Strategic Plan Objectives[a]												
School Name	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	4.4	5.2	5.3	5.5
River Hill Elementary		1	1	1				1		1			
Eastview Elementary		2		1	2					2			
Vista Junior High[b]	1	1								3		1	
Seascape Junior High	2	1	2	2			2		1			1	
Total by S. P. Objective	3	5	3	4	2	0	2	1	1	6	0	2	0
Total by S. P. Goal	11			10						6	2		
Percentage by S. P. Goal	37%			34%						20%		7%	

[a] See Appendix O for strategic plan objective numbering and verbiage.

[b] No activities were included in the action plan document provided to the researcher; no formal action plan was submitted to the central office as of October 1.

Table 20 indicates that over two-thirds (37% plus 34%) of the linkages of the upward approach schools' action plan goals were to objectives under Strategic Plan Goals 1 and 2; 71 percent of those linkages were to Goals 1 and 2. The upward aligned schools' remaining linkages were primarily to a staff development objective (20%).

Table 21

Action Plan Downward Approach Linkage to Strategic Objectives

	Strategic Plan Objectives[a]												
School Name	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	4.4	5.2	5.3	5.5
Valley Elementary		3	2	2	1	1		1		1		1	
Panorama Elementary		1	1			1	1			1	1	2	1
Eastbay Junior High				1									
Total by S. P. Objective	0	4	3	3	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	3	1
Total by S. P. Goal	7			8						2	5		
Percentage by S. P. Goal	31%			36%						9%		22%	

[a] See Appendix O for strategic plan objective numbering and verbiage.

Table 21 indicates that over two-thirds (31 percent plus 36 percent) of the linkages of the downward approach schools' action plan goals were to objectives under Strategic Plan Goals 1 and 2; 67 percent of those linkages were to Goals 1 and 2. The downward aligned schools' remaining linkages were primarily to community collaboration objectives (22%). The difference between the percentages of the linkages to Strategic Plan Goals 4 and 5 was greater than the difference between the percentages of the linkages to Goals 1 and 2. Due to the nature of data arrayed in Tables 20 and 21, nonparametric statistics were not appropriate to test for significance of these differences (Gravetter & Wallnau, 1996, p. 570).

Table 22 displays data derived to implement a chi square test of the difference between the principal's approach to alignment and number of strategic plan goals addressed by the school's action plan. For this test the χ^2 (1, N = 7) = .0583, p<.10. A null hypothesis of no difference by approach was established for this test. The χ^2 value of .0583 is less than the critical value of 2.71 at a .10 level of significance, which results in failure to reject the null hypothesis. It was concluded that the differences in the num-

Table 22

Planning Approach Relationship to Strategic and Action Plan Attributes

	Alignment Approach	
Plan Attributes	Downward	Upward
Number of Strategic Plan Goals		
Few = 5 or Less	1	1
Many = 6 or More	2	3
Number of Strategic Plan Objectives		
Few = 7 or Less	1	3
Many = 8 or More	2	1
Number of Action Plan Goals		
Few = 2 or Less	1	2
Many = 3 or More	2	2
Number of Action Plan Goal Criteria		
Few = 8 or Less	1	2
Many = 9 or More	2	2

ber of strategic plan goals addressed in an action plan based upon the approach to alignment was not significant. (See Appendix N for a detailed description of the methodology employed to prepare data for the Table 22 display and testing.)

Table 22 also displays data derived to implement a chi square test of the difference between the principal's approach to alignment and the number of strategic plan objectives addressed by the school's action plan. For this test the χ^2 (1, $N = 7$) = 1.2153, $p < .10$. A null hypothesis of no difference by approach was established for this test. The χ^2 value of 1.2153 is less than the critical value of 2.71 at a .10 level of significance, which results in failure to reject the null hypothesis. It was concluded that the differences in the number of strategic plan objectives addressed in an action plan based upon the approach to alignment was not significant.

Relationships to Approaches

As noted at the start of this section, one of the subsidiary research questions guiding this study was whether there were significant differences between the action plan goals and activities created by principals who describe an upward versus a downward approach to action plan alignment.

Table 22 also displays data derived to implement a chi square test of the difference between the principal's approach to alignment and the number of action plan goals established in each school's action plan. For this test the χ^2 (1, $N = 7$) = .1944, $p < .10$. A null hypothesis of no difference by approach was established for this test. The χ^2 value of .1944 is less than the critical value of 2.71 at a .10 level of significance, which results in failure to reject the null hypothesis. It was concluded that the differences in the number of action plan goals in an action plan based upon the approach to alignment is not significant.

Table 22 also displays data derived to implement a chi square test of the difference between the principal's approach to alignment and number of action plan goal criteria met by all the goals in the school's action plan. For this test the χ^2 (1, $N = 7$) = .1944, $p < .10$. A null hypothesis of no difference by approach was established for this test. The χ^2 value of .1944 is less than the critical value of 2.71 at a .10 level of significance, which results in failure to reject the null hypothesis. It was concluded that the differences in the number of action plan goal criteria met by an action plan's goals based upon the approach to alignment is not significant.

Table 23 displays the frequency with which the principal's approach to alignment was associated with action plan goal types addressed by the school's action plan. The notable difference between the two approaches was the greater number of nonacademic goals contained in the upward alignment group. The upward aligned schools' evenly split their action plan goals between academic (50%) and nonacademic (50%). The downward aligned schools action plans contained 60 percent nonacademic goals and 40 percent academic goals.

Table 23

Planning Approach Relationship to Action Plan Goal Type

Planning	Action Plan Goal Type			
Alignment Approach	Academic	Percent	Nonacademic	Percent
Downward	4	50.0%	4	50.0%
Upward	4	40.0%	6	60.0%
Total	8	44.4%	10	55.6%

Due to the nature of the Table 23 data, non-parametric statistics were not appropriate to test the significance of this difference (Gravetter & Wallnau, 1996, p. 570). Visual inspection suggested the difference was insubstantial. Overall, the result of the statistical analyses indicated that the differences in the variables tested were not significant in relationship to the principals' approaches to alignment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to discover how and to what extent school administrators develop school action plan alignment to implement objectives consistent with district-level strategic goals and objectives. It sought to find whether principals plan and act locally to implement global policy strategically envisioned by district policy-makers, or if they plan and act locally in response to local needs, and then retroactively fit the local plan to a global model. The research focused on (a) the nature of action plans that principals construct at schools, (b) principals' and key teachers' perceptions of the nature of linkage of action plans to the district's strategic plan, (c) the process used to construct action plans, and (d) the extent to which the content of school action plans correspond to the content of the district strategic plan, and to the principal's planning approach. The specific research questions developed for this project were designed to serve as a framework for personal interviews and to guide document analysis.

The design selected for this research was the embedded case study. The school district itself served as the macro unit of analysis, or the overall unit of the case study. The schools served as the micro unit of analysis to provide for both between-case comparisons and relationships between the schools and the district. At the same time, the focus on the district as the overall unit of analysis afforded the opportunity to view the larger policy process and examine the linkage between expectation and implementation, rather than focus on implementation only.

Discussion of Results

This portion of chapter 5 is divided into six sections. The first three are the product of the analysis of perceptions and documentation surrounding the action planning process, the participants in the planning process, and the planning influences. They are followed by an analysis of the centralizing and decentralizing influences of planning and discussion of action planning approaches in light of the central office expectations, the principals' and key teachers' views on planning approaches, as well as the results of statistical tests of association.

Action Planning Processes

One of the questions guiding this research on the nature of action planning that principals conduct at schools was how principals develop action plans. One of the major research products was learning about how principals and their staffs went about planning. The planning processes were developed from the descriptions of eight principals and thirteen teachers at, documents collected from, and observations of seven schools.

Principals developed action plans using multi-step processes. Each of the principals developed action planning processes that he or she perceived fit the needs of his or her school. Analysis of the process used at each school demonstrated that similarity of process steps existed among the schools. Several steps were used at some schools, some steps were found at most schools. When viewed at a detailed level, none of the steps could be found at all schools. When each process step's topographical characteristics were analyzed from a general (fewer characteristics) view, rather than a specific (more characteristics) view, more of the steps' topographies were held in common across the schools.

Training was not emphasized explicitly by principals or teachers to the same extent as was small group and large group processing during their descriptions of planning. However, the result of pattern matching across school processes demonstrated that training appeared early and explicitly in the process at four of the schools, and was implied in the remarks of the remaining three schools' staffs. Four of the principals described staff development activities within their planning processes. However, at all of the schools either the principal or the teachers described inservice activities linked to their action planning processes in some fashion. Training appeared to be an important step in the planning process. This may be especially so when a school is attempting to integrate new concepts such as curriculum standards and assessment, into the action plan. Training was perceived to serve as a preparatory component of the planning process; it occurred early and was referred to by principals and staff as a point of initiation for concepts and discussions that eventually produced action plan goals and activities related to the district strategic plan.

Another aspect of how principals went about planning that emerged from the process data was central office support for planning processes. Five of the seven principals described using some combination of central office-provided resources during their planning processes (Alliance, facilitation, Tom Jones, etc.). Resources provided by the district's central office became a part of the process concomitant with the staff perceiving the central office to be influencing the process. This form of capacity-building paralleled the central office administrators' perceptions, and school staffs' perceptions, of central office influence upon the action planning products (goal content).

Finally, all of the principals and many of the teachers referred in some fashion to incorporating their SLIBG planning into the action planning process. SLIBG planning was described to be either an integral part of, or parallel to, action planning processes. SLIBG resources provided by the legislature, and the associated requirements for implementing those resources, were perceived to influence how plans were developed. The section on influences explores more extensively the nature of this perceived influence.

Each site also exhibited distinguishing characteristics; each planning process contained steps unique to a particular school. The nature of the differences may be the result of the relative strength of the influences perceived by the principals and their staffs, or the result of principals' philosophies and leadership styles, or the constellation of participants in the process, or the history of collaborative behavior at the schools, or a combination of these and other factors. Whatever the reason, unique characteristics were identifiable for each school within the overall case, and bear devotion of some discussion with respect to those distinctive attributes.

River Hill Elementary. The River Hill principal relied extensively on a small core of teachers to take training and then lead the balance of the school staff in applying assessment results to the planning process. The use of committee meetings between general staff meetings was primarily to synthesize information developed at the larger meetings, and to develop the content for the next step of the planning process. The process was sequential in nature, and committees were not used to make decisions, rather to frame them.

This principal focused on the nature and practice of assessment above all else. She displayed in the elementary school's main office the current school goals, and the results of the most recent assessment of progress toward standards the goals included. She readily related progress by the district and the school toward implementing a planning system focused on student outcomes. Based upon the amount of leadership exhibited by teachers and the regular participation of parents, the teachers' focus on students' performance and the consistent involvement of parents in setting priorities appeared instrumental in the development of River Hill's process. All three key teachers described in depth the manner in which they assisted with the generation of the school's action plan goals and activities. This provided an exceptionally clear example of retrofitting to develop alignment to the strategic plan, and indicated a widely inclusive process nature with many steps, as well as concurrence of staff views regarding approach.

Valley Elementary. One of the distinguishing features of Valley's process was the use of multiple committees surrounding the planning process. Unlike River Hill's process, the committees were standing groups rather than ad hoc. Unlike Panorama, the committees were not curriculum oriented, rather they were functional in nature. And unlike Eastview's process, there were multiple committees.

Valley's committees served to manage elements of the planning process as a significant function. Another unique aspect of Valley's process was the parallel nature of the committee work. The principal described parallel steps in some instances during the planning process, rather than sequential. The advisory and grant writing/action planning task force meetings operated this way. It appeared this was to operate as an efficiency aspect of the planning design that was intended to compress the process.

Another unique aspect of Valley's planning process was the plan-to-plan step. None of the other schools' principals or teachers described the assembly of a group of staff to plan the school's action planning process. The described intent of this step was to develop understanding and gain acceptance of the process. The principal implied the expected effect was improved participation and plan acceptance. This school suffered difficulty arriving at closure due to teacher concerns with pay contained in action plan resources. This was perceived to compound the action planning process. It is possible this nullified the efficiency expected from the plan-to-plan step.

Panorama Elementary. At Panorama the most remarkable aspect of the planning process was the widespread use of standing curriculum-oriented committees to manage the planning process. Panorama's process was designed around the three committees in which the majority of the teacher participation was expected to occur, and in which parents held membership and evidently participated regularly.

The three main committees, Technology, Writing, and Community Involvement, began on the year's work at the outset of the 1997-98 school year. Panorama formed committees around the 1997-98 goals. Panorama's planning committees corresponded to three resource emphases offered by the central office: technology, writing, and community collaboration. The school's publications repeatedly described their work and the participants engaged in the planning and implementation cycles. Panorama's principal described her school as one in which authentic, responsible participation was becoming the norm rather than the exception. She perceived that this shift and the tie to standing, curriculum-related committees produced a more effective planning process.

Eastview Elementary. Eastview's principal described his staff's resistance to anything having to do with assessments, educational designs, or grant applications. His school was not, to paraphrase the view his words expressed, nearly as far along as other schools in embracing and integrating the state's and the district's priorities for planning. The general resistance to planning, and his own self-assessed weakness in planning, corresponded to other indicators of an abbreviated process at Eastview.

Another indicator of the abbreviated planning process at Eastview was the planning group changes from 1996-97 to 1997-98, shifting from the Building Goals Committee in 1996-97 to the Leadership Team in 1997-98. The principal related, in what he characterized as an embarrassment, a story about the key teacher responsible for the previous planning cycle. He described her disassociating herself from the assessment-driven nature of the planning in which the district was engaging. This was described to result in the "pinch-hitting" done by this year's participants.

These unique aspects of interviews at Eastview indicated the principal and his staff were disinclined to implement a planning process with broad involvement, nor to embrace the strategic plan priorities. The key teacher's descriptions of a "get the district off our back" view corroborated the principal's characterizations of the school staff's negative view of central office influence and the approach with which the school was expected to conduct planning. The principal's view corresponded to his view of his own lack of training in the planning process. His view supported the pattern matching data indicating the importance of training in support of action planning.

Vista Junior High. The action planning process at Vista Junior High was distinguished primarily by the undistinguished manner in which it unfolded. The process steps were vaguely described, and in some instances were indistinguishable without repetitious questioning of the participants. A unique attribute of the process was its lack of clarity to an observer. This contributed to the process a diffused character not encountered at the other schools; however, a diffusion better characterized as benign rather than active. Active diffusion might be perceived as designed to obscure; no such intent was expressed in any of the interviews.

Unique also to this school's process, interviews with the principal and teachers at Vista Junior conveyed an independent tone dissimilar to any felt during data gathering. Interview tone was not a characteristic of the protocols, nor of the analysis, nor a derived characteristic of the planning processes observed at the seven schools. However, at this school the tone was a characteristic of the impression transmitted by the interviews, and which clung to the data throughout the analytic process. Resembling Eastview, the Vista Junior High staff conveyed a disassociation of the school from the district, an independence from central authority. Like Eastview, but unlike the other junior highs, the planning characteristics that, in part, conveyed this tone were no parent input in the action planning process (distinguishable from minimized parent participation in the SLIBG plan), no student participation described whatsoever, and a teacher description of the nature with which the principal let the teachers know what the district expected.

Eastbay Junior High. Eastbay's process was unique in the amount of goal processing accomplished by constituent groups. Parent meetings produced goal ideas brainstormed by parents. School staff meetings were used to gather and share staff input and parent input. Student meetings produced brainstormed goal ideas. The principal and assistant principals also produced potential goals for prioritization. Eastbay's process was the longest and, unlike the processes at other schools, recirculated data to large groups out of design rather than in response to dissension (e.g., Valley Elementary).

Seascape Junior High. The most distinguishing characteristic of planning at Seascape was the team involvement. The teams were not the result of a planning process design, nor an aspect of the planning process. The pre-existence of the teams resulted in the establishment of planning steps to accommodate the structure.

The needs assessment steps, conducted in preparation for establishing action planning goals, also were unique in the principal's approach to planning. Needs assessment was conducted informally in the teams (as compared to formally in large groups at Eastbay Junior). This contributed, in the principals' view, to collaborative participation and consolidation via her facilitation, described as being like shuttle diplomacy.

The process steps designed to involve parents and gather support for goals from parents were unique with regard to how the principal went about including parents. The existence of the Parent Network, the PTSA Cabinet, and the School Cabinet forming the junior high's governance structure contributed as well to the parental and student involvement steps unique to Seascape. Extensive involvement of parents, as a more general planning characteristic, was similar to Eastbay's and River Hill's processes.

Planning Participants

Another component of the study question guiding the portion of this research regarding how principals develop action plans was who participates in the planning process. Teachers and administrators participated in planning at each of the schools. Teachers were more involved than parents, students, or community members. This may have been due to their sheer numbers and to their roles in shared decision-making processes at each school. Of all the constituent groups, teachers had the greatest personal stake in the outcome of the planning process with the exception of students (who participated rarely), because the plans affected their jobs and their pay.

Parents participated in planning at five of the seven schools. At three of those five schools parents were involved repeatedly and in large group settings. Regardless of the techniques used to analyze school staff perceptions about parental participation, no pattern of data reduction elucidated the perceived impacts on planning processes of different ways parents were said to be involved. What did become apparent from the data was that the district policy and central office administrators expected authentic involvement, but the results varied. School interviewees reported parental participation varied from extensive (Eastbay Junior) to none (Eastview).

Eastview Elementary and Vista Junior High's principals acknowledged that parents were not involved in the planning process at all during the year. In both instances parents were members of the SLIBG committees, but these committees did not participate in the action planning process. These were also schools at which the principals described and espoused upward alignment approaches. (Refer to Table 12 for planning participants by school). At Eastbay Junior High, a school with one of the most lengthy processes and only one goal as a process product, the principal most extensively involved large numbers of parents in the processing reported. This was a unique case in which parents were requested to both offer goal suggestions and take an active part in formal priority setting exercises. Parent participation was found in varying degrees, but was not related to a particular approach or action planning product.

Some principals specifically described attempts to include all of their school staff members. Other principals only attempted to include teachers. Classified staff were described as participating in action planning at three of the seven schools; half of the elementaries and one of the three junior high schools. Those schools that actively included classified staff in the action planning process did so intentionally. Only at River Hill did the principal repeatedly emphasize the involvement-in-theory (expected) and involvement-in-practice of the classified staff. Seascape's and Panorama's principals also referenced classified participation, but not to the extent at River Hill. There the principal's belief was that classified should be paid for participation any time teachers were paid. Classified staff were not described as significant participants or influences on the planning process or products.

Students' participation in the planning process was the exception rather than the rule. Only at Eastbay did the principal plan and ensure direct and widespread participation by the students, who participated in the action planning process through the student television station. Students provided input on goals and priorities, which were posted in the faculty room along with teachers' and parents. At Seascape the principal included the student government council as part of her goal information sharing and feedback process. Students as participants were reported not to have influenced the goal setting process at five of the schools. Students were, however, actors in several schools' goals, instead of being the object of the goals. Panorama and Valley Elementary both established such community goals.

As a vehicle for participants, committees were used to channel involvement at all of the schools in a variety of forms. Six of the principals utilized committee structures of one sort or another in their processes. Two of the junior high schools heavily utilized department heads or teams. At Seascape, teams were described to serve the purpose rather than committees or councils, but the group participation process was similar to departments or curriculum committees at other schools (for the purpose of planning participation). Three of the elementary schools use specialized planning committees, and one used standing committees. Eastbay Junior High used only large staff, parent, and student meetings. Committees developed and refined action plan components, and acted as subsidiary decision-making groups at six of the seven schools.

Data indicated committees were an important aspect of schools' planning processes, but that they did not make the final decision on goals or activities. Rather, committee structures provided a preliminary decision-making role, deciding on final goal and activity language to bring to staff meetings for formal, school-wide decision-making. In this way principals ensured at least a modest level of public acceptance by their staffs, and sometimes parents, consistent with the district's shared decision-making policy.

As a result of reviewing the planning process data, it seemed that longer planning processes involved more participants. Because precise, reliable data was not available on the actual number of participants at every step of each school's process, it was not possible to draw conclusions regarding associative relationships between participant and planning characteristics.

Planning Influence Perceptions and Synthesis

One of the study questions guiding this research was why principals use the planning method they described. The intent of this question was not to develop a chain of causality in so complex a process as school action planning, but to discover what principals perceive to be factors that influence the manner in which they develop their schools' plans. One of the results of this research was the identification of perceived influences. Another, the result of additional data reduction and analysis of the nature of each of these, were observations that a hierarchy of perceived influences existed, and that they possessed centralizing or decentralizing characteristics within the organizational planning structure.

All of the principals mentioned teachers, parents, standards and assessment as influences on their planning. The majority of principals mentioned the central office, strategic plan, the needs of students, educational design programs (e.g., Atlas, Alliance), the state's student learning improvement grant program, and curriculum implementations and planning influences. Central office priorities—the strategic plan, standards and assessment, and curriculum—were described more often by principals than other possible influences. Curriculum implementation was mentioned as an aspect of central office influence, even through described by four principals and other interviewees separately from other central office influences. This section reviews briefly each of the various perceived influences and identifies relationships among the planning influences. In the conclusion section a structure is proposed for conceptualizing the centralization characteristics from the data and hierarchy described in chapter 4, and discussed here.

State policies. Three principals identified the policies of the state of Washington as an influence on their action planning. Answers to other questions indicated that all of the principals implicitly perceived the influence of state policies to have affected their planning. The following two sections addressing standards (curriculum requirements) and assessments and school improvement grants actually represent the state's intent to influence schools' planning. The next two sections describe the perceived influence of the tripartite state program: setting the standards of performance, providing funding to increase capacity-building to perform at standard, and testing for achievement of the standards. These influences were described by interviewees in such as fashion as to be characterized as a centralizing influence on planning. All of the standards, resources, and assessments were consistent across all schools, which influenced schools' efforts in the direction of the policy intent. Both central office actions (standardized curriculum adoptions) and schools' actions (curriculum implementation, training, assessment activities) provided data indicating centralizing influence.

Standards. One of the key results of this research is that no matter how strong the upward alignment approach of the principal was, the downward thrust of state standards and the assessment program was perceived an important influence in planning. At each school, principals and teachers described the impact of the Washington State essential academic learning requirements, coupled with the Washington Assessment of Student Learning program, which was perceived as having significant influence on their planning whether they agreed or not with the standards or the downward influence. Two principals indicated that the standards and assessment structure was the number one influence on their schools' planning. During the year examined for this research, or during one or more of the two years prior, each school's action plan contained goals specifically addressing some aspect of the state standards and assessment structure.

Although junior high principals clearly perceived the state standards and assessment program to be influential on their planning, in two instances their answers about influence of standards and assessment were vague in comparison to other principals'. At Eastview the principal indicated that he actually carried the burden of influencing the action plan toward including a school action plan goal. At Vista Junior High the principal did not discuss the influence of standards and assessments in detail. In the other instances, principals provided specific examples of the influence of standards and assessments on the work their schools did.

SLIBG grant. The state's school improvement grant program is another potential influence on school planning. Principals perceived the SLIBG grants as influential in their planning processes and outcomes. They described how they folded SLIBG planning into their action planning, in some cases indicating the school's action planning process was synonymous with the grant planning process. This perceived impact on the school's budget, and the action plan, was reinforced by junior high principals. Because resources available through the SLIBG program were a significant element of the school's action planning resources, the program was perceived as a strong influence on the planning process.

The SLIBG program requires parental involvement in grant application planning and implementation. The program is for the improvement of school staff instructional skills necessary to improve student performance. The focus of this resource was described by principals and teachers as influencing how they went about action planning, who participated, and the kinds and purposes of plan goals. The SLIBG program was perceived as influencing parental involvement, the focus on staff development, and the emphasis on student learning improvement. The perception that multiple planning processes needed to be blended and aligned with the district's strategic plan, although partially attributed to the SLIBG requirements, was also considered to be the result of central office influence, through which the SLIBG applications and reports were processed.

Central office. The influence perceived to be exerted by the central office as an intended broad influence on the planning process was the most extensively described element of the range of planning influences. It was more frequently mentioned and more fully described than was the perceived influence of the strategic plan. The district central office was said to have influenced the planning process and content through establishing resource priorities, planning assistance, planning training for staff, planning training for principals, inservice on defining and establishing goals, requiring specific action plan reporting formats, and through establishing planning deadlines. The central office was perceived to have exerted influence as a conduit for state influence by establishing and emphasizing standards and assessment programs consistent with state requirements.

Primarily, principals perceived as influential central office efforts to develop student learning-related goals at the schools, and to emphasize the measurability of goal and objective statements. The consistent message from the superintendent's office that district focus was moving from teacher performance to measurable student performance also influenced the action plans, according to principals. The narrowing focus and alignment of resources around district emphases as identified by the central office was perceived to be influential at both the elementary and junior high levels.

Principals' comments indicated that central office administrators influenced their focus on goals related to student learning and assessment. Two principals described the influence of the central office administrators within the larger framework of assessment and accountability to the district's stakeholders, in particular parents and taxpayers. These perceived influence themes emerged again in discussions of the state and the standards and assessment frameworks. These are downward alignment and centralizing influences, and were unwelcome to some interviewees (e.g., the Eastview staff).

Strategic plan. The strategic plan, bargained agreements, and shared decision-making were less often mentioned, and not accorded significant roles in influencing the action planning process or contents. Nevertheless, six of the seven schools' principals described the strategic plan as an influence on the planning process. However, the descriptions were structural in nature: the principals conveyed a sense of routine to the manner in which the strategic plan influenced their school action planning. The most common influence features described by those principals were (a) the mechanics of identifying which strategic plan goals and objectives the action plan goals addressed; (b) association of resources to priorities embodied in the strategic plan; (c) the hierarchical place of the strategic plan in the structure of national, state, and local priorities; and (d) philosophical elements of the strategic plan's priorities.

The nature of the principals' descriptions provided data from which to infer that the influence was not inherent in the plan, but rather in its function as a conduit for other influences. The strategic plan did not seem to be perceived to be intrinsically influential. Instead, its reflection of state priorities, its use as a resource gateway, and the action plan development requirement embedded within it were factors perceived to be influentially associated with action planning. Again, these perceived influences possessed centralizing characteristics as they defined directions in which all schools were expected to progress. As a result, the strategic plan is characterized as a centralizing influence.

Curriculum. It is difficult to separate the notion of the curriculum as a perceived influence from the central office as a perceived influence on action planning. The central office was viewed as influencing the planning process through curriculum adoptions and implementations. One of the principals' four most-mentioned influences was curriculum implementation, likely because schools throughout the district were expected to implement a change. Although in some aspects the implementations were optional (e.g., one or two years to implement). Curriculum program changes were described as resource intensive efforts; the central office coordinated and concentrated resources (in the view of principals) in order to ensure adoption. Central office-controlled funds paid for schools' related instructional materials, and staff development resources were employed to assist with the implementation.

Curriculum adoptions in the school district were not established in a vacuum. The state's essential academic learning requirements were perceived to have exerted particular influence on the district's curriculum choices. Staff from across the district participated in the selection process. Curriculum adoptions and implementations were described by principals as influential in the goals they and their parents and staff members selected as priorities for their schools.

Educational designs. Five principals described educational designs as influential in their planning. Some felt the central office's emphasis on the restructuring schemes promoted by the organizations promoting each educational design, and the resources offered by those groups, was supportive of what they desired to accomplish in their schools. Some principals did not perceive those relationships to be helpful. Four mentioned the design programs' linking the structures of an educational design, the district's strategic plan, and their schools' action planning and action plan contents. However, none of the 1998-99 action plans contained a reference to an educational design. It appears that the influences of educational designs specific to school action plans was more evident in prior year's plans, particularly those addressing integration of knowledge and skills across curricular disciplines or areas. Educational designs may serve as centralizing influences because adopting their tenets can result in implementing curriculum and organizational similarities across schools claiming membership in the design consortium.

Shared decision-making. Shared decision-making was an expectation that the district board of directors and central office executive administration worked to establish. Shared decision-making was identified in interviews as a planning influence by both central office administrators and the teachers' association representative. Shared decision-making was not perceived to be enough of an influence on the action planning process, or the content of action plans, for principals to mention; neither shared decision-making nor their buildings' models were described as an influence.

However, the comments of four principals indicated or implied the existence of shared decisions-making models at their schools: two indicated specific uses of a model; two indicated non-use. Improvement of shared decision-making was described at one school as a prior goal and a continuing effort. So, although the concept of shared decision-making was not described as an influence in the planning processes at all of the schools, the documentary evidence obtained during data gathering indicated that shared decision-making processes were used at each school. In essence, the data indicated that the levels of importance of the models in the process varied among the sites, but the district policy as interpreted by the central office administrators during interviews was implemented at six of the seven schools. Shared decision-making was a central office issue.

Bargained agreements. Collective bargained agreements between the district and its various employee groups were not described as an influence in the planning process. However, the provisions of the agreements do relate to what can be planned. They simply weren't mentioned, save once by one person, as an influence. If this research were to be conducted again, using other data collection methods, such as focus groups, the influence of bargained agreement provisions may be viewed in a different light.

Students' needs. The influence of the needs of students was identified by principals in only the broadest of senses. In identifying students' needs as an influence, principals provided few specifics about those needs. As a general label, students' needs served as a banner superordinate to a variety of specific influences more usefully coded in the data analysis process to areas such as standards and assessments, educational designs, and curriculum. That is to say, the needs of students were translated by interviewees into more descriptive topics that served to parse and tag them in a manner more responsive to management at the school and district levels. More specifics about the nature of students' needs were identified during interviewees' descriptions of the influence of standards and assessment results, as well as the implementation of curriculum.

Teachers. This research anticipated that teachers would be identified as a significant influence upon the content of action plans and process by which action planning occurs at schools. The manner in which teachers influence the process was not identified by principals, save the plan-to-plan step discussion at Valley Elementary. As a result of the interviews, the influence of teachers in the action planning process took on a multidimensional character.

Descriptions of teachers exerting influence on planning related to both large and small group settings. Teacher influence was infrequently referenced to the process or content accorded to individuals. An expectation at the outset of research was that small groups of opinion leaders at schools would be identified by principals as exerting pressure on processes and goals within large group meetings. This was not borne out by the interview data, nor the school literature related to planning. Department heads were mentioned as influential, but the larger debates and the priority-setting occurred in the staff meetings. Teacher influence appeared to be managed by principals through teacher involvement in team training activities, particularly those sponsored by the district's staff development program and related to educational designs (e.g., Alliance, Atlas).

However, at elementary schools more so than at junior high schools, the strength of one individual or a few individuals was often described as influential. At Panorama a language arts specialist was identified by the principal as a driving force in the development of the action plans. At River Hill a small cadre of teachers led the planning activities with the principal and one parent throughout the process. Otherwise the influence again was diffused throughout groups of teachers or the teaching staff as a whole.

Parents. The variation in descriptions of parental influence in action planning among schools was a noteworthy outcome of this research. Principals described influence levels associated with the differences in parental participation. The more the parental participation, the more the influence accorded the parent community. The more the parental participation, the more the importance the principal expressed that parents be involved. While no discernible pattern in the variation with respect to school type was found, it seemed that elementary school principals expressed more desire to involve parents throughout the planning process. At elementary schools, parents were involved more in inside-the-school committee work, beyond that required for the SLIBG plan development. However, the most extensive processing with parents occurred at a junior high. This appeared to be attributable to the principal's style.

One of the more perplexing outcomes of this research was the lack of any discernible association between parent involvement and the nature or volume of goals developed in the action plans. It does not seem defensible to state that parental participation and involvement didn't matter, but it was not evident from the data that parents exerted any particular influence across the schools. That they were perceived so by some principals was evident in the manner in which their views were sought during the planning processes at five of the schools.

School administration. It was a foregone conclusion that principals, and very likely their assistants at the junior highs, would be considered influential in action planning at all the schools. The more valuable aspect of the research results was identifying four distinguishable though related facets of potential influence: planning preparation, planning process, plan content, and buffering. Details of those facets were described in chapter 4. However, it seems worth noting that principals as a planning influence should be considered in relationship to the entire notion of alignment approach, and in relationship to principals' leadership styles. The nature of principal leadership may serve as a mediator of influence and approach.

Clues of such a relationship between influence and leadership style may be found in nature of the influences described by principals and teachers. Principals supported staff workshop attendance they believed would produce change in teacher skills or attitudes, that addressed perceived school needs, or that were politically advantageous to attend. The buffering influence was described by principals who acknowledged the influence they exerted on content or process as a result of central office emphases.

Two junior high school principals' emphasized their guiding influence on the action planning process. Differences in influence styles could be found in: (a) Panorama's principals' attendance at committees, but not chairing any; (b) in Valley Elementary's principal's comment that it was best if he didn't lead any of the committees or working groups; (c) in contrast to the leadership Eastbay's principal demonstrated by leading all of the major information gathering and priority setting meetings; (d) and in contrast to the Seascape principals' "shuttle diplomacy" approach to building consensus among her constituencies. The influence of the school administration on the planning processes and products was largely overlooked by the interviewees in describing influences on action planning, but very evident in their descriptions of how the processes unfolded and who participated in those processes.

Community needs. The community surrounding a school, distinguished as a constituency from parents of students who live and may work in the community, was explicitly considered influential in action planning at only one school, a junior high. At Seascape, physical plant use by the community at large and integration of service learning into the curriculum, meant expressly contemplating the community's needs in the action planning process. This involvement was consistent with the principal's attempts to draw businesses into the school curriculum.

Similarly, but not as extensively, the community surrounding Panorama was invited and accessed to support the school's community involvement goal. In this instance the hearty linkage to the district's strategic goal of collaborating with community resources contributed four-fifths of the instances of downward aligned action plans' relationship to that strategic goal (see Table 21). No other schools prominently emphasized community (separate from parents) in action planning discussions. This was not an expected outcome. The district emphasized community involvement by establishing it as one of five strategic goals. Central office executive administrators' emphasis on student learning improvement and achieving high standards (the first two of the strategic goals), as well as selecting fewer goals to concentrate resources, may have overshadowed the comparative importance of the community goal from the perspective of principals.

Beliefs of school staff. Mission statements were expected to be found at the core of the schools' planning processes. Mission statements are commonly considered a key component in strategic planning systems implementations. Mission statements in educational institutions are customarily considered a touchstone document in the institutional planning structure. The influence of the mission statement was a follow-up probe for the first question of the first principal interview (see Appendix A).

The mission statement, or an analogous document labeled a statement of belief, was identified as an influence upon the planning process at only two schools. At Seascape Junior High the beliefs of school staff was described as a philosophical approach to education that was interwoven with the planning of the school. The influence of what was described to be a middle level philosophy among the school staff was also noted as a planning influence at Eastbay Junior High. Neither beliefs nor mission statements were mentioned at the third junior high or any of the four elementary schools.

This was not expected. It may be that beliefs of staff, or the mission statement, are so deeply integrated into school administrative and teaching staffs' perspectives that they do not surface as conscious drivers in the action planning process. There was no evidence of that, either. The only conclusion safely drawn from this data was that the mission and beliefs were not sentiently considered influential in the action planning process.

Colleagues' views. Another of the influences expected to be identified by principals and key teachers during the interviews about the planning process was that of teachers on other teachers. This would seem to be a natural influence on the process, and was expected to be identified in concert with the perceived influence on planning of teachers, which was discussed several paragraphs earlier. Surprisingly the views of teachers as colleagues were not mentioned by either principals or teachers. However, there were instances where examples of collegial influence were mentioned during interviewee responses about planning discussions.

The notion that some teachers were more influential than others was mentioned by the principal at Eastbay Junior High. One of the teachers at Vista Junior High related how her curriculum-oriented goal suggestion was swamped by the voices of colleagues interested in concentrating on student discipline. The process at Valley Elementary was extended by additional iterations of plan revision in response to teacher concerns about the amount of release time to be paid for by the SLIBG grant. Nevertheless, strong voices in the faculty were not described by principals or teachers as being influential in the development of action plans.

Fellow principals in the planning process were identified, however, as a collegial influence by one principal. Her description of junior high principals' influence on one anothers' planning was not repeated by other principals. It was, though, an unusually valuable statement: she described the development of a particular goal by a group of principals. Activity toward the goal was to be implemented at all of the junior high schools in response to a strategic need. Because the reading goal was found in each of the junior high school action plans reviewed for this study, it was accepted as indication of the strong influence of principal colleagues on planning products. It may be that a different approach to inquiring about, or developing other indicators of, collegial influence would benefit future inquiries into the influences on school action planning.

Synthesis. The trail from information about the interviewees' perceptions of influences to why principals plan as they do is, at best, an inductive undertaking. Principals provided information about what they perceive to be influences on planning, and about how they go about the planning process. Principals can provide reasons that lead us from their description of the process to why they chose a particular system. Their opinions as to why and how events occur, gathered during interviews using semi-structured protocols, develops individuals' speculation as to cause and effect. This research intended to gather information about those processes and perceived influences that might begin to provide explanatory insights. Several general areas of explanation were developed as a result of the data collection and analysis. These areas are conceptually organized based upon their source, whether state, district, or school, as described in chapter 4.

From the state level three significant areas of perceived influence were related to school planning. State policies in general prescribe much of what is done in the school (e.g., length of year, length of day, available funding, etc.). Specific state policies that principals perceived to direct in some fashion their planning processes and products were the state's standards and assessment efforts and the SLIBG grant. Schools have to have a SLIBG plan to earn the funds, and that plan must involve parents and teachers. The grant may only be used for certain purposes, so those purposes were integrated into school plans. Likewise, the state's student achievement standards and related assessments were perceived by principals, and teachers, to affect what schools planned. The standards were perceived to produce changes in curriculum that had to be assimilated at the school-level. The assessments related to those standards were considered to have driven construction and implementation of plans to improve both student performance and teacher skills and knowledge in assessment areas.

Principals and teachers indicated they perceived the need to respond to district-level pressures in specific areas, including participation in educational designs (e.g., the Alliance), implementation of district curriculum standards, which some perceived to be directly linked to the state's standards, and preparation for district implementation of state-mandated assessments as well as district-sponsored assessments. The strategic plan seemed not to drive process, but was perceived to operate to bring together the foci at a district-level of standards and assessment, shared decision-making, and collaboration (again, associated thematically with the SLIBG requirements). The influence of the central office was perceived to have narrowed to these areas that were taking on a higher level of importance as public attention (in particular the print and electronic media) focused upon them. From both the district and state levels the emphasis seemed to be on the "what" of the school action plan, with the SLIBG providing motivation for limited impetus regarding the "how" of school action planning.

What needed to be done and who needed to be involved at the school-level is where the "why" of the processing seemed to be most firmly located. The general notion of students' needs carried with it the "must implement the curriculum" and "must prepare for the WASL ... everyone is watching that" motivation. To accomplish this, some principals felt they must align their plans with the district strategic plan to take advantage of resource pools reserved for specific purposes, such as curriculum and training.

Primarily the desire, and partly the expectation, to develop consensus seemed to be the motivations for the processing in which principals engaged. Principals did not say, “If you don’t involve teachers, the classified staff, the administrative team, and parents in this process school action planning will not be successful.” But they described and demonstrated processes in which they included teachers, classified, administrative staff, and in most cases parents. They attributed to some degree the SLIBG grant requirement for this, but generally described it as a matter of normal behavior. Involving teachers was a matter of routine that did not rise to the level of a conscious issue during discussions: principals and teachers did not describe the involvement staff as a matter of question, simply as a given in order to discover and distill needs and beliefs (related both to educational approach and programmatic priorities). What remained was a variety of ways in which principals said they worked to gain that involvement and investment. This research did not attempt to discover the “why” of process variations.

As an apparent consequence of these perceptions, it was portrayed that school action planning processes were conducted by principals to involve, in particular, teachers and school administration, in most cases parents, and in limited circumstances students. Processes were modified by school staff in certain instances; principals aimed to identify the issues most important for the school to work on. It seems that, from the perspective of principals and teachers, the inclusion of staff to arrive at consensus, and the history of decision-making processes at the school were significant reasons why planning was implemented by principals in a particular fashion (principal-led at Eastbay Junior, committee-led at Panorama, short and simple at Eastview). And the most significant influences on planning products were the state’s and district’s emphases on curriculum standards and assessments.

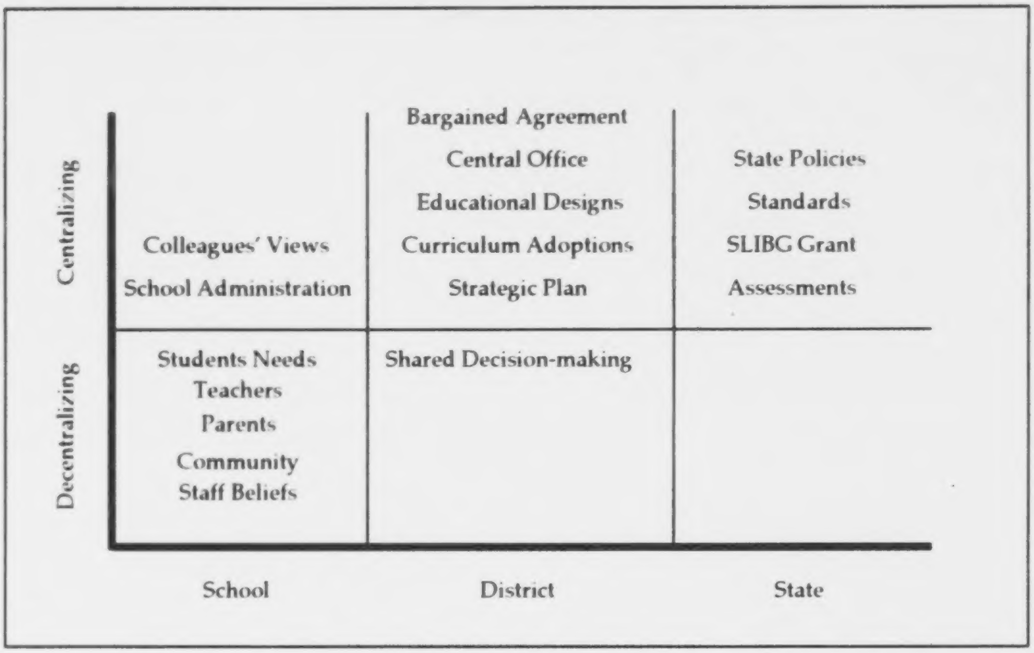
Centralizing vs. Decentralizing Planning Influences

Part of the analysis for chapter 4 reviewed and characterized the perceived influences on the planning process as emanating from one of three general sources: the state, the district, or the school. The nature of those influences, as perceived by the principals and teachers, and as analyzed in and of themselves, included characteristics that lent themselves to classification both by source and by the degree to which they were perceived to have a centralizing or decentralizing influence.

Some of the perceived influences may be argued to have induced schools to adopt plans consistent with the directions preferred by the state. Some of the perceived influences may be argued to have induced schools to adopt plans consistent with the directions preferred by the district central office. Some of the perceived influences may be argued to have induced schools to adopt plans consistent with the directions preferred by the staff (and likely the parents) at that school.

Influences perceived to affect planning at schools may therefore be portrayed visually on a two dimensional model. Figure 2 displays such a model. Its axes represent centralizing versus decentralizing influences, and local versus non-local influences. Centralizing influences on planning at schools included the state's standards and assessments and student learning improvement building grants, and district-level forces such as curriculum standards and adoptions, bond-funded technology investments, investments in educational design programs, and the strategic plan. Decentralizing influences included teachers, school administration, parents, students, community, beliefs, and the implementation of shared decision-making.

Washington's essential academic learning requirements and the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, twin products of the state's efforts to increase student performance across the state, are efforts to prompt schools to teach curriculum prescribed to some degree by the state legislature. The SLIBG grants are carefully described by the state in an attempt to promote specific ends, even though there is latitude in how to implement the ends at each school. These may operate as centralizing forces. The absence of influences in the lower right segment of the figure indicates that this research did not discover any decentralizing influences perceived to emanate from the state-level.



	School	District	State
Centralizing	Colleagues' Views School Administration	Bargained Agreement Central Office Educational Designs Curriculum Adoptions Strategic Plan	State Policies Standards SLIBG Grant Assessments
Decentralizing	Students Needs Teachers Parents Community Staff Beliefs	Shared Decision-making	

Figure 2 Planning Influence Matrix

Southcoast's decision to implement the EALRs, to focus on the WASL, and to implement curriculum standards that support the state standards may be argued to have produced a centralizing influence on schools. The curriculum adoptions must be implemented at all schools, and, theoretically, taught in all classrooms. This limits the individual curriculum choices that may be made, in a decentralized fashion, independently at the schools. The strategic plan reportedly is intended to focus the schools on district priorities. These are perceived influences which are arguably centralizing.

Shared decision-making, on the other hand, is a perceived influence which may be argued as being decentralizing. The involvement of teachers and parents in the decision-making processes, as portrayed in the planning processes, demonstrates a focus on the needs of the school rather than the priorities of the state. Those principals who described downward processes indicated they worked to establish in the minds of their constituents the boundaries within which they could prioritize locally.

At the school-level, the majority of the perceived influences are arguably decentralizing, tending to establish directions and priorities based on the perception of school needs. The exceptions are school administration participation and administrators' colleagues' views. From principals' descriptions of their perceived influence on the planning process, they tended to set parameters as noted in the preceding paragraph. Even at those schools where principals took an upward alignment approach, their perceived influence on the planning process may be considered to be centralizing. Examples of the presence of a potentially centralizing influence are: (a) focusing on the state and district standards and assessments, (b) agreeing with other principals as to common goals across schools, and (c) engaging staff members in planning and assessment training associated with educational designs (e.g., Alliance, Atlas).

Action Planning Approaches

Two study questions guiding this research pertained to how principals characterize the alignment of school action plan goals to district strategic goals and objectives, and from the perspective of corroborating or non-corroborating sources, how key teachers involved in planning processes describe development and alignment of school goals to district goals and objectives. This discussion compares what was described as expected of principals (policy intent) with what principals and teachers described (policy implementation). It looks first at policy intent from the central office perspective.

Central Office Expectations. Of the six key findings described in chapter 4 that resulted from analysis of the interviews of, and documents obtained from, the school district's central office administrators, four findings hold policy implementation importance. Two others, the existence of the strategic plan and the requirement to develop action plans were not central to the focus of this research. The remaining four policy implementation expectations were important vis-à-vis the results. They were:

- Central office administrators responsible for schools, curriculum, and planning expected that principals would develop action plans to implement the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.
- Central office administrators responsible for schools, curriculum, and planning expected that action plans would focus, in particular, on the improvement of student learning.
- Central office administrators responsible for schools, curriculum, and planning expected principals to develop action plans using a process that involved staff, parents, community, and students in decision-making.
- Four central office administrators responsible for schools, curriculum, and planning described the direction of the approach to alignment between the district and schools as downward, from the strategic plan to the action plan.

This data led to the expectation that principals would combine multiple plans into a single school action plan, link action plans to strategic objectives, involve constituents in the planning process, and plan from the strategic plan to the action plan—take a downward approach. Seven of the eight principals described internalization of the strategic plan through their use of the plan objectives and directions in discussions and in goal setting. This alone did not mean, however, that they ascribed to, or described activities and beliefs characteristic of, an "upward" or "downward" alignment approach. Examples of school's action plans provided indicators of "acting locally to enact global policy" established by district policy-makers.

Principals' views as to their schools' relationships to district-wide plans diverged along two paths. In following the first path, the principal's school plans were designed with the district objectives in mind. Local needs were perceived as important, but not perceived to override the consensus obtained at the district level. In this case, the district directions created the framework for school priorities. In following the second path, the school's local needs outweighed the district's priorities. In this case, the school determined its needs and priorities first. Then its staff either rationalized them to the district's strategic objectives, or "shopped" the district's plan to find which objectives could be fastened upon to support (philosophically, financially, politically) the local priorities. As it turned out, this was not an easy distinction to make in analyzing and re-analyzing the data, as both principals and teachers provided mixed messages with respect to the approach they actually took in constructing their action plans.

Upward Alignment. One of the principal purposes for conducting this study was to discover whether school administrators develop goal alignment and implement action plans consistent with district-level strategic intent. The district's expectations of downward alignment were mirrored by principals' perceptions of how school action plan goals should be related to district goals and objectives in only three of the seven cases. In the majority of schools participating in this study, principals offered evidence that action plans were developed, and with some elements of the strategic objectives having been taken into consideration.

Two elementary principals expressed differing views of their upward approach to connecting district directions and school actions. In both cases they described their efforts as being designed at the school first, and thereafter related to the strategic plan. Neither of these two principals described any downward-oriented practices or views during either of their interviews.

In the case of Eastview resistance to central office directions was evident to the extent that the principal rationalized the school action plan to be tied adequately to the district strategic plan saying that if the district plan was of any value, it would accommodate the school's directions. The principal further minimized the importance of the district strategic plan as being distant from the reality of the school as perceived by the staff. At Eastview, the principal's notion of upward alignment included a general indifference toward the emphases of the district through the strategic plan. Instead, he focused upon how the district's structure could help his school meet its needs as his teachers saw those needs.

Principals who took upward alignment approaches tended to express views that emphasized decentralization. One view was the supplier-of-resources view which was also advanced by a junior high principal who described this characteristic of upward alignment as "shopping the plan"; sort of cherry-picking among the plan objectives to find the one that best supports what it is the school desires to accomplish. Another view associated with the upward approach was that the strategic plan was really a very general sort of document that expressed important themes rather than district priorities for its schools. This notion of imprecision was not limited to school administrators and teachers. That the strategic plan's terms could be viewed as too vague was also a concern for one central office administrator. The principals' views associated with an upward approach helped distill the characteristics of the approach that led to classifications. The principals' views tended to communicate a sense of emotional distance from the central office, a disassociation with the larger organization. The flavor of these principals' comments raised for the researcher the possibility of an additional question of leadership style influence on planning approach.

Downward Alignment. Three principals viewed and practiced alignment as a downward-oriented affair, with the district strategic plan as the starting point. The perception that strategic plan components are vague did not necessarily act as a critical attribute for identifying the principal as a proponent of an upward alignment approach. Of the three principals identified as taking a downward alignment approach, one also expressed a view regarding the too-general nature of the strategic plan elements.

At Eastbay Junior High, the principal reinforced his concept of parameters for planning and allocating resources during a portion of the interview in which he discussed the work he did with parents in goal setting. He established the boundaries for the work the school needed to accomplish in the coming year, providing borders within which he believed school plan development needed to focus. His view of guiding and shaping eventual action planning products with the parameters established by the district signaled one of the two easily discernible downward approaches.

The most conflicted description of alignment, and therefore most difficult to classify, was found at Valley Elementary School. The principal characterized in detail the changing purpose of planning at the school level. He described what he perceived to be the associated diminution of the school's "local control" of directional planning, expressing the view that action plans no longer are about "what" the school will adopt as a priority during the coming year, but rather about "how" the school will implement the "what" decisions made at the district office. This principal was one who placed major emphasis on the resource leverage theme while describing the school's loss of autonomy. The principal's description of implementing what had already been decided at the central office-level is indicative of the need, if not intent, to establish subordinate goals supportive of the district's direction (and application of resources).

Teachers' descriptions of the pieces of the planning processes closely paralleled those of their principals. However, teachers generally could not describe the entire process as succinctly as principals, nor could they provide the historical perspective of the evolution of planning readily related by several of the principals. Rather the teachers filled in the blanks regarding process and participants, corroborating what the principals related in most cases, and contradicting in some instances.

Teachers were less aware of district role; they didn't address the perceived influence of the central office in same fashion. In general, they were more general about central office influence, less aware of the strategic plan or strategic planning implications for their schools, and occasionally characterized both as something they heard about from their principal, and therefore viewed through their principals' eyes.

Teachers readily characterized their school's approach to alignment as upward and downward, and provided descriptions of planning that contained attributes of upward and downward approaches. Teachers comments led to the inference that they prefer upward alignment, but that several viewed downward alignment as inevitable in the current educational environment.

Relationships to the Strategic Plan and Alignment

Strategic Plan. Another of the key questions guiding this study was whether there is a relationship between schools' action plans and the strategic plan goals and objectives. Chi-square statistics were calculated using the data from the principals' planning approach to test for the significance of differences with respect to the number of strategic plan goals and number of strategic plan objectives addressed. Chi-square results permited only the conclusion that the differences in the number of strategic plan goals and the differences in the number of strategic plan objectives addressed in an action plan based upon the approach to alignment, were not statistically significant.

Descriptive statistics were used to assess the differences in the linkages based on alignment approach. Analysis of the action plan goals indicated that over two-thirds of schools' goals were linked to objectives under Strategic Plan Goals 1 and 2. For the schools that took an upward alignment approach, 71 percent of the linkages were to goals 1 and 2. For the schools that took a downward alignment approach, 67 percent of the linkages were to goals 1 and 2. The difference in the number of goal 1 and 2 linkages identified for two approaches was minor.

The difference in the percentage of the linkages to Strategic Plan Goals 4 and 5 when sorted by alignment approach was considerably greater than the difference in the number of goal 1 and 2 linkages. The schools identified as taking an upward alignment approach linked primarily to the strategic plan's staff development goal. The schools identified as taking a downward alignment approach linked predominantly to the strategic plan's community collaboration goal. Because only descriptive statistics could be applied to this data, statistical significance of the differences could not be tested.

What can be said is regardless of the approach taken by the principal to aligning school goals with the strategic plan, at least two-thirds of the linkages were to strategic goals aimed at establishing high standards and focusing on student learning. Regardless of the alignment approach, principals and schools did not establish goals to increase public involvement in decision-making. When upwardly aligned schools did not establish goals linked to establishing high standards or focusing on student learning, their goals were three times more likely to link to the strategic goal of providing high quality support systems (in this case staff development) than to the strategic goal of collaborating with community resources. When downward aligned schools did not establish goals linked to establishing high standards or focusing on student learning, their goals were nearly two and one-half times more likely to link to the strategic goal of collaborating with community resources than to the strategic goal of providing high quality support systems.

Alignment. Another subsidiary research question guiding this study was whether there were significant differences between action plan goals and activities of principals who describe an upward versus a downward approach to action plan alignment. Chi-square statistics were calculated using data from action plan goals and alignment approach. Again, differences in the number of an action plan's goals based upon the approach to alignment, and differences in the number of action plan goal criteria met by an action plan's goals based upon the approach to alignment, were found not significant.

Once more, descriptive statistics were used to assess the differences in the goals content based on alignment approach. The notable difference between the two approaches was the greater number of nonacademic goals contained in the upward alignment group. Upward aligned schools produced fewer goals, and the split was two-to-one in favor of the nonacademic goals. Downward aligned schools goals were split evenly between academic and nonacademic content. It seems that, taken as a group, those principals who took a downward approach produced more academic goals, i.e., goals focused on the improvement of student learning, in consonance with the expectations of the central office administrators.

Is this difference in the number of academic versus nonacademic goals statistically significant? While descriptive statistics demonstrated some differences between the characteristics of the plans and goals when arrayed by alignment approach, no tests of statistical significance were possible due to the nature of the action plan construction. The differences found using inferential statistics were not determined to be significant. The results of these statistical treatments were not instructive with respect to associative inference. The nature of goals and activities may be such that statistical tests are not appropriate gauges of relationship characteristics. It may also be that the small number of action plans assessed contributed to unreliable results.

Conclusions

If this research reinforces any existing knowledge, it is that school management is a complex affair. Many variables are likely to affect a principal's perceptions of the value of planning, what should be included within plans, and how planning should occur. The number and perceived impact of principals' self-reported influences on planning alone were significant. This research design was not intended to develop causal links between district policy and school action, but to discover how selected school leaders approached the implementation of district policy and what they perceived to have influenced their approaches. Other variables not identified by this research method may affect the principals' attitudes toward these factors.

Nevertheless, this research reinforced several aspects of existing theory and research in planning. Within the public school setting, strategic planning is employed to develop a consistent view of the world throughout the schools of a given district, and to establish a foundation for educational activities related to the strategies (McCune, 1986). Strategic planning assumes the construction of consistent plans at an operational level to achieve successful outcomes (Kaufman, Herman & Watters, 1996). Alignment of district-wide resources and efforts to accomplish a central set of objectives is a significant theme underlying this form of planning.

This research successfully explored some aspects of the nature of the action planning principals conduct at the school. It found principals developed action plans using multi-step processes, and that although each site exhibited unique characteristics, across several school sites action plan processes resembled key aspects of a strategic planning process (e.g., environmental scan, values clarification, strategy development, implementation). However, the characteristics of action planning as described by principals and key teachers generally were not comparable to models described in relevant strategic planning literature. Principals generally attempted to include all of their school staff members at some point or points, and utilized committee structures of one sort or another in their processes. Staff development or inservice activities were linked to their action planning processes in some fashion.

Principals appeared to use planning methods they described to involve teachers, to align with the district to take advantage of resources, to involve parents and teachers in accordance with SLIBG requirements, to implement required curriculum, and to respond to state and district pressures (e.g., standards, assessments, educational designs).

Principals perceived school action plan goals and activities to be related to district strategic goals and objectives in the sense that they must be connected to the strategic plan in order to comply with the central office response requirement. Principals perceived that the state standards and assessment influences are called out in strategic plan and action plan goals, and some perceived educational design (e.g., Alliance, Atlas) influence in the strategic plan structure and therefore their action plans. Principals generally perceived that their action plans were related to district goals and objectives because they must be accepted by the central office.

Principals characterized their approach to the alignment of school action plan goals to district strategic goals and objectives as upward or downward; four described approaches characterized as upward and three described approaches characterized as downward. One of the three provided very mixed messages regarding approach. Most principals described their desire to approach alignment of plans from the local level to the central level, but influence descriptions illustrated downward pressures on the school. Key teachers involved in planning described developing and aligning school goals to district goals and objectives similarly to principals' descriptions. Teachers could not describe entire planning processes as completely as principals, but they filled in the missing pieces in most processes and corroborated principals' accounts in most cases.

Action plan goals and activities do align to varying degrees with the strategic plan goals and objectives. It was not possible to assess the correlation between school sites' action plan goals and activities and the strategic plan goals and objectives; correlations are not applicable given the nature of goal production: multiple goals produced by a school violates correlation formulae assumptions. The range of goals made summative statistics inappropriate for correlative statistics. However, content analysis proved useful for labeling goals based upon standard meaning of language used by the authors.

There were differences between the action plan goals and activities described by principals who portrayed an upward versus a downward approach to action plan alignment, but nonparametric statistics produced no significant association, rendering unattainable a grounded statement of a positive relationship between content of goals and strategies, and content and approach.

In summary, this study developed data indicating that principals do plan and act locally to implement global policy strategically envisioned by district policy-makers. And, rather than "or," they also plan and act locally in response to local needs, in most cases retroactively fitting the local plan to the global (district) model. There was not a statistically significant difference in the content of their school action plans corresponding with the difference in their approach. In addition to the conclusions developed pursuant to this study's subsidiary research questions, another conclusion evolved regarding the centralizing nature of the planning structure and the principals' approaches.

The act of strategic planning is in itself a centralizing process. Southcoast's strategic planning system contains the elements expected to be found in a systems approach to strategic planning. The district board conducted a district-wide strategy development process involving citizens and parents, central office administrative staff, school administrative staff, teachers, and classified staff representation from both the central office and the schools. The board of directors formally adopted the strategic plan.

Tactical plans are part of a strategic planning systems approach offered by several authors. The strategic plan contained objectives specifying construction and implementation of tactical plans, called action plans in the district. The district expected schools to establish action plans tying school actions and resources to district objectives. This is a centralizing approach, the expected policy effect of which is to implement district priorities at all schools. Data collected from the schools demonstrated all of the principals developed action plans in accordance with the written requirements of the plan, and in all but one instance using the format designed for action plan submission.

At the same time, the influences described by principals and teachers at the school-level exhibited characteristics that appear decentralizing in nature. More principals preferred to operate from the unique needs of their schools, and teachers described similar preferences. The involvement of parents was described to be focused on the needs of the school rather than on the directions influenced by the central office (the latter serving as more of a boundary for decision-making than a focus of direction). The consideration of the needs of students "at the school," rather than "of the district," implies the desire to travel in a local direction rather than the direction advanced by the district. It appears that the global-local nature of the educational policy structure is reflected in the structure of the strategic planning system implemented in this district. This implies a strategic-tactical tension that was not anticipated in research design.

Informing Strategic Planning Theory

One of the subsidiary questions guiding this research pertained to the ways in which the characteristics of action planning was comparable to a selected model described in relevant strategic planning literature. The related result of this research was an action planning process analysis from which a model action planning process flowchart was produced. The model's ten steps (see Figure 1) represent the process components found at the schools. Six of the steps comprise a subset found at a majority of the schools. Analysis of the schools' action planning steps determined that the schools' processes bore little resemblance to the tactical or operational planning described in two of three strategic planning authorities' work selected from the literature for comparison.

Planning Process. Virtually nothing in Steiner (1979) resembled the individual processes or the common process derived from them. Steiner's approach addressed the establishment of organizational aims and strategies, the construction of detailed plans for action and methods for determining their achievement, and reinforced the expectation of a network of detail-level plans that support the organizational strategies. Although several of Steiner's guides appeared to be similar to steps used by the central office administrators and school principals, the processes used at the schools bore little resemblance to the tactical or operational planning described in the Steiner model; the process steps utilized by the schools in developing action plans was not described by the Steiner work.

Mauriel (1989) described no tactical or action step processes like the case study schools' principals used. Processes used by the principals did produce goals that met at least three of the criteria set forth by Mauriel, but no process model for developing those goals was provided by Mauriel. Kaufman (1995), however, provided a verbal—not visual—model describing school-level planning steps, most of which were similar to steps used by the schools' principals. Kaufman's 23-step, micro-level planning model contains 17 steps clearly comparable to the school action planning conceptual model derived from the analysis of the schools' processes. The school action planning conceptual model is mainly analogous to a specialized (one not designed for application beyond educational planning) school-level tactical planning model found in the literature.

The model's common action planning steps were notably similar to the essential components of strategic planning at the district-level as distilled from the literature reviewed for this study. The strategic planning models, which included components specific to tactical planning as part of the overall strategic planning system, contained elements of strategic planning specific to the whole-organization, or macro, level. In this case the macro level is the district level, not the school level. Those strategic planning elements were (a) a plan to plan, (b) the environmental scan, (c) SWOT analysis, (d) vision, mission, and values clarification, (e) strategy development, (f) tactical planning, (g) implementation, and (h) evaluation of results. This data supports characterizing the action planning process as a miniature version of the strategic planning process (systems approach), scaling down those elements to a scope manageable by schools. As a result, process-oriented literature designed for implementing and improving strategic planning processes may be fitted to the school level for improved action planning process results.

Action Plan Goal Characteristics. A collateral aspect of the analysis conducted as part of this research was identifying the structural characteristics of school action plan goals. There were no particular processes or models for establishing operational plans described within the literature reviewed for this research. Nor were there in the literature advanced by the authors (Kaufman, 1995; Mauriel, 1989; Steiner, 1979) models or criteria for assessing operations plans, per se. However, central office administrators and several principals were very specific about the inclusion of certain characteristics within the goals established by the schools. It seemed incongruous to expect school leadership to construct goals without the establishment of models or characteristics by which to assess the degree to which the action planning products met the standards. Principals and central office administrators discussed what should be in the goals, and what the goals were expected to address. Common aspects of their comments included student learning and measurability. But beyond those two characteristics there was little agreement among their descriptions about what action plan goals should look like.

Consonant with subsidiary research question I. C., the three authorities on strategic planning were once again consulted for tactical plan characteristics (Kaufman, 1995; Mauriel, 1989; Steiner, 1979) in order to establish criteria for distinguishing and labeling school action plan goal characteristics. The definitions synthesized from these authors' descriptions, combined with the additional central office criteria of student-related goals, i.e., goals focused upon the improvement of student learning, may be useful for subsequent research or assessment of the action plan goals. The six refined action plan goal characteristics resulting from this research are as follows:

1. Growth: The goal statement should involve some stretching. It should not be a target too easily reached. A baseline must be established if growth is to be documented.

2. Linked: The goal statement should be consistent with adopted organizational strategies. It must support the mission and should do so clearly.
3. Measurable: The goal statement should include measures that are observable, concrete, and quantifiable over time. It should use scale criteria to enhance measurability.
4. Specific: The goal statement should be understandable. It should state what is to be accomplished simply and accessibly so that organizational members can acquire its meaning. It should include specific time parameters to inform readers when completion is expected.
5. Standard: The goal statement should be flexible; modifiable under changing environmental conditions. It should state who or what will demonstrate accomplishment. It should state the methods for assessing the achievement and conditions under which accomplishment will be observed.
6. Students: The goal statement should be student-related. It should focus upon the improvement of student learning.

Within the school district that served as the setting for this research, the preeminence of student learning improvement as a district priority was a value advanced by the majority of the research participants. The establishment of goals that address student learning improvement was described to be of paramount importance. As a result, the research was expected to discover goals with student learning improvement as an easily identifiable characteristic. This was not the case. It seems that the "end game" of improved student learning, in contrast to the methods by which improved student learning is achieved (e.g., staff development, curriculum improvement), are not yet a standard characteristic of goal development at the school level. Neither has the literature on strategic planning distinguished this aspect of strategic planning systems implementation.

Further Research

This research expands the body of results developed by earlier projects in school planning (particularly Bingham, 1996; Freericks, 1991; Hoffman, 1996; Nessmith, 1992). It adds a view of school-level action planning as conducted at a sample of schools within a district selected as a case study. Because it studied one district at a point in time, and should not be generalized as representative of all districts or action planning, within its limitations are the seeds of several lines of additional research. Five areas are suggested both by this research and the results offered in the field by prior studies.

First, it became evident that school principals took different approaches to action planning, and for a variety of stated reasons. Some reasons may be related to their leadership styles and values; some appeared to be related to influences in their environments. It would be useful in future efforts to understand planning to find or develop a leadership assessment instrument capable of distinguishing between leadership styles of principals who take downward versus upward alignment approaches. The underlying values may be significant with respect to the approach followed by a principal.

Second, a body of nomenclature surrounding planning evolved as a result of this work. A more comprehensive, consistent glossary of terminology should be assessed. Then the validated terms could be used for survey research to determine the relative strengths of perceptions of influences on the planning process. An approach using validated instruments to develop reliable constructs and variables, possibly employing aspects of semantic differential (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957) or Thurstone scales (Tuckman, 1994), would help to clarify factors that influence school action planning.

Third, influences and principals' approaches as factors in the planning model constitute a view of system inputs. Research in school planning must also focus on the system's outputs to better understand the cyclical nature of the system. Neither literature reviewed for this work nor this effort focused on whether the school staffs' efforts to implement action plans produced the outcomes they intended. A follow-up study to determine the outcomes of action plan implementation would expand our knowledge of the school-level success of action planning. Comparing results of schools where downward versus upward alignment approaches are pursued could develop knowledge of correlations between planning approaches, planning products, and plan outcomes.

Fourth, little has been done to learn about the relationships that may exist between action plan development, content, plan implementation results, and student learning improvement. In the process of narrowing the topic for this research from school improvement to decentralization to strategic and action planning, only one study (Summers & Johnson, 1994, 1995) of all those found during the literature search process attempted to associate student learning results as a school improvement strategy. It would be of value to pursue measurable relationships that might exist between tactical planning at the school level and student learning outcomes.

Fifth, the nature of this research and its results calls into question whether school districts, at least in this state, do indeed plan strategically. If the key elements of the districts' products and processes are driven so significantly by state-wide standards and assessment tools, and there remains little in the way of competitive forces in the service area, how much latitude does a district really possess to make truly strategic choices? Further research would do well to attempt to determine whether what is being conducted in school districts is strategic, or simply a long-range implementation plan for the strategies adopted by the legislature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol A

Principal & Central Office Administrator Interview Protocol - First Visit

Preliminary Statement

["First, I'd like to describe the overall purpose of this research."]
[Describe research, provide summary paper, obtain release.]
[For central office administrators, substitute "principals" for "you."]

Main Questions

I. Description of kind of planning conducted at the school, planning influences.
  a) *What are the main forces that influence the way you plan, and the results of these plans?*
    i) Probe: *Academic program planning?*
    ii) Probe: *Central office staff?*
    iii) Probe: *Strong voices in faculty?*
    iv) Probe: *Parental involvement?*
    v) Probe: *School mission statement?* [Sample?]
    vi) Probe: *School district plans?* [Sample?]
    vii) Probe: *Kind of planning conducted at your school?* [Sample?]
  b) *How do you see school planning fitting with district planning?*
    i) Probe: *Participation in district planning?*
    ii) Probe: *Planning or reporting processes?* [Sample?]
    iii) Probe: *In what senses is your planning related to district plans?*
    iv) Probe: *How do you accomplish the relationship to district plans?*
  c) *Can you give me some ideas of how you budget based upon your school plans?*
    i) Probe: *How are budget priorities connected to school plans?*
    ii) Probe: *Use school plan in budgeting?* [Show me?]
    iii) Probe: *Distribute budget information?* [Sample?]

Appendix B: Interview Protocol B

Principal Interview Protocol - Second Visit

Preliminary Questions
["First, I'd like to ask you a couple of general questions about < Name of > School."]
What has <Name of> School been focusing on this year?
What do you feel the school has accomplished over this year?
What are the most important changes that have been implemented this year?
["Thank you. Next, I'd like to ask you a couple of general questions about planning at <Name of> School."]

Main Questions

II. Description of how school plans, action plans changed over the years.
- a) *Could you describe the process you use for developing your school's action plans?*
  - i) Probe: *How is the process started?*
  - ii) Probe: *Length of time for process?*
  - iii) Probe: *Steps in the process?* [Diagram?]
  - iv) Probe: *How is the process concluded?*
  - v) Probe: *Key process decision points?*
  - vi) Probe: *How is the process communicated?* [Document?]
- b) *Who participates in your school's action planning process?*
  - i) Probe: *How were they selected?*
  - ii) Probe: *Length of time in process?*
  - iii) Probe: *Role in the process?*
- c) *Have action plans changed for your school over the past two years?* [Sample?] *[If yes, then ask] What are the main forces that influenced these changes?*
  - i) Probe: *Students?*
  - ii) Probe: *Student achievement?*
  - iii) Probe: *Strong voices in faculty?*
  - iv) Probe: *Parental involvement?*
  - v) Probe: *School district plans?*
  - vi) Probe: *Central office staff?*
- d) *How do you see action planning fitting with district planning?* [Show me?]
  - i) Probe: *How do you use the district plan in this process?*
  - ii) Probe: *How do others use the district plan in this process?*
  - iii) Probe: *In what senses is action planning related to district plans?*
  - iv) Probe: *How do you accomplish the relationship to district plans?*

Appendix C: Interview Protocol C

Teacher Interview Protocol - First Visit

Preliminary Questions

[First, I'd like to ask you a couple of general questions about < Name of > School.]
What has <Name of> School been focusing on this year?
What do you feel the school has accomplished over this year?
What are the most important changes that have been implemented this year?
[Thank you. Next, I'd like to ask you a couple of general questions about planning at <Name of> School.]

Main Questions

II. Description of how school plans, action plans changed over the years.
  a) *Could you describe from your perspective as a teacher the process your school uses for developing your school's action plans?*
    i) Probe: *How is the process started?*
    ii) Probe: *Length of time for process?*
    iii) Probe: *Steps in the process?* [Diagram?]
    iv) Probe: *How is the process concluded?*
    v) Probe: *Key process decision points?*
    vi) Probe: *How is the process communicated?* [Document?]
  b) *Who participates in your school's action planning process?*
    i) Probe: *How were they selected?*
    ii) Probe: *Length of time in process?*
    iii) Probe: *Role in the process?*
  c) *Have action plans changed for your school over the past two years?* [Sample?] *[If yes, then ask] What are the main forces that influenced these changes?*
    i) Probe: *Students?*
    ii) Probe: *Student achievement?*
    iii) Probe: *Strong voices in faculty?*
    iv) Probe: *Parental involvement?*
    v) Probe: *School district plans?*
    vi) Probe: *Central office staff?*
  d) *From your perspective as a teacher, how do you see action planning fitting with district strategic planning?* [Show me?]
    i) Probe: *How do you use the district plan in this process?*
    ii) Probe: *How do others use the district plan in this process?*
    iii) Probe: *In what senses is action planning related to district plans?*
    iv) Probe: *How do you accomplish the relationship to district plans?*

Appendix D: Research Question Matrix

Research Question Matrix - Interview Question and Other Sources

Research Questions	Interview Questions							Doc.
	I.A.	I.B.	I.C.	II.A.	II.B.	II.C.	II.D.	C.A.
I.A. How do principals develop action plans?				X		X		
I.B. Why do principals use the planning method they describe?	X					X		
I.C. In what ways are the characteristics of action planning as described by principals and key teachers comparable to a selected model described in relevant strategic planning literature?			X	X	X			
I.D. In what sense do principals perceive school action plan goals and activities to be related to district strategic goals and objectives?		X					X	
I.E. How do principals characterize the alignment of school action plan goals to district strategic goals and objectives?		X					X	
I.F. How do key teachers involved in the planning process describe the development and alignment of school goals to district goals and objectives?		X			X		X	
II.A. Is there a positive correlation between school sites' action plan goals and activities, and the strategic plan goals and objectives?								X
II.B. Are there significant differences between the action plan goals and activities created by principals who describe an upward versus a downward approach to action plan alignment?		X					X	X

Appendix E: Document Review Plan

Document Gathering Matrix - Document Types and Sources/Locations

	School Board Office	Superintendent's Office	Strategic Planning Office	Budget Svcs. Office	School Principal's Office	School-Site (Faculty)
Strategic Plan		X				
School Board Minutes	X					
1996-97 Action Plans			X		X	
1997-98 Action Plans			X		X	
1998-99 Action Plans			X		X	
Parent Newsletters					X	
Action Plans Instructions			X			
School Planning Process					X	X
Planning Timelines			X			
School Statistics				X		

Appendix F: Document Review Protocol

Document Review Protocol - Inclusion and Coding Guide

1. Document Inclusion Qualification
    a) *Describes action planning process*
    b) *Identifies planning participants*
    c) *Describes school goals, improvement activities*
    d) *Announces action plan content*
    e) *Reports plan progress, goal accomplishment, school improvement*
    f) *Requests planning participation*
    g) *Describes related committee activities (SLIBG, Advisory)*
2. Forces influencing action planning
    a) *Academic program plan*
    b) *Student achievement*
    c) *Central office staff*
    d) *Strong voices in faculty*
    e) *Parental involvement*
    f) *School mission statement*
    g) *School district plans*
    h) *Budget allocations*
3. Action planning relationship to district plans
    a) *School district strategic plan goals*
    b) *Budget information*
    c) *Curriculum adoptions*
    d) *Staff development*
    e) *School design concepts (e.g., Alliance)*
4. Action plan changes over past two years
    a) *Faculty involvement*
    b) *Parental involvement*
    c) *Student achievement*
    d) *School district format requirements*
    e) *Budget allocations*
5. Process used for developing school's action plan
    a) *Use of the district goals, objectives in this process*
    b) *Action planning fit with district planning*
    c) *Faculty leadership, involvement*
    d) *Steps in plan development, adoption, implementation*
6. Participants in the process for developing school's action plan
    a) *Process participants*
    b) *Participant roles in the process*
    c) *Relationship (to strategic plan) perceptions expressed*
    d) *Contribution to plan*

Appendix G: Interview Transcript Code Structure and Definitions

(1) /Base Data
Definition: Base data is coded beneath this node. In this instance codes are mutually exclusive at the lowest levels (e.g., male/female of gender).

(1 1) /Base Data/Position
Definition: Interviews are coded at sub-nodes to this node based on the interviewee's position of employment with the district.

(1 1 1) /Base Data/Position/Principal
Definition: Interview respondent is a school principal.

(1 1 2) /Base Data/Position/Administrator
Definition: Interview respondent is a central office administrator.

(1 1 3) /Base Data/Position/Teacher
Definition: Interview respondent is a teacher.

(1 1 4) /Base Data/Position/Association
Definition: Interview respondent is a teachers' association officer.

(1 2) /Base Data/Gender
Definition: Interviews are coded at sub-nodes of this node based upon the gender of the interviewee.

(1 2 1) /Base Data/Gender/Male
Definition: Interview respondent is male.

(1 2 2) /Base Data/Gender/Female
Definition: Interview respondent is female.

(1 3) /Base Data/School Type
Definition: Interviews or other documents are coded at sub-nodes to this node based upon the type of school represented by the interviewee or document.

(1 3 1) /Base Data/School Type/Elementary
Definition: Document or interview source is an elementary school.

(1 3 2) /Base Data/School Type/Junior High
Definition: Document or interview source is a junior high school.

(1 3 3) /Base Data/School Type/High School
Definition: Document or interview source is a senior high school.

(2) /Cases
Definition: Documents are coded to sub-nodes of this node based on source within the district. Schools are embedded cases. Other sites are for convenience.

(2 1) /Cases/River Hill
Definition: Documents, interview transcripts or otherwise, in whole or in part, and references that belong to River Hill Elementary.

(2 2) /Cases/Valley
Definition: Documents, interview transcripts or otherwise, in whole or in part, that belong to Valley Elementary.

(2 3) /Cases/Panorama
Definition: Documents, interview transcripts or otherwise, in whole or in part, that belong to Panorama Elementary.

(2 4) /Cases/Eastview
Definition: Documents, interview transcripts or otherwise, in whole or in part, that belong to Eastview Elementary.

(2 5) /Cases/Vista JH
Definition: Document, interview transcripts or otherwise, in whole or in part, that belong to Vista Junior High.

(2 6) /Cases/Eastbay JH
Definition: Documents, interview transcripts or otherwise, in whole or in part, that belong to Eastbay Junior High.

(2 7) /Cases/Seascape JH
Definition: Document, interview transcripts or otherwise, in whole or in part, that belong to Seascape Junior High.

(2 8) /Cases/Central Office
Definition: Documents, interview transcripts or otherwise, in whole or in part, that belong to the school district central office rather than a school site.

(2 9) /Cases/Association
Definition: Documents, interview transcripts or otherwise, that belong to the Southcoast Education Association, the teachers' union.

(3) /Action Plan
Definition: Documents and interviews are coded to sub-nodes of this node based upon their school action plan reference or content.

(3 1) /Action Plan/Alignment
Definition: Alignment indicates the act of conforming to district priorities or school priorities in action planning. Alignment refers broadly to the successful guidance of the members throughout the organization. It is a term narrowly applied to the creation of (a) subsidiary plans, whether described as tactical or operational in effect, (b) designed to implement all or part of a strategic plan, and (c) forming an integrated approach by organizational subunits. For purposes of this research, alignment was defined to mean specifically the approach by which the content of schools' action plans are associated with, or linked to, the strategic plan, and the extent to which the sites' action plan goals and activities correlate with the strategic plan. Coding occurs at sub-nodes.

(3 1 1) /Action Plan/Alignment/Downward-Practice
Definition: Constructing action plans so that goals are intended to be subordinate to and supportive of strategic goals/objectives. Responses to indirect questions about process, relationship, influence indicate district drives content. Downward alignment refers to (a) constructing action plans in such a fashion that (b) the site's goals and activities are (c) intended to be (d) subordinate to and (e) supportive of the district strategic plan goals and objectives. More goals linked to, and more links from goals to, strategic objectives indicate stronger alignment with the strategic plan.

(3 1 2) /Action Plan/Alignment/Upward-Practice
Definition: Constructing action plans independent of the district plan, then adjusting words to link goals to strategic goals/objectives to meet local needs. Upward alignment refers to (a) constructing action plans (b) independent of the district plans, and then (c) adjusting, revising, or situating site goal and/or activity language so as to (d) associate the action plan goals to the strategic goals and objectives that (e) best fit the desired action plan goals and activities. Upward alignment label principals' descriptions of approaches

to linking their schools' action plans to the strategic plan by constructing action plans independent of the district plans, and then justifying school goal and/or activity language as associated with the strategic goals and objectives that fit best.

(3 1 3) /Action Plan/Alignment/Neutral-Practice
Definition: References to linking action plans to the strategic plan (goals/objectives), but that are neither downward nor upward in alignment approach.

(3 1 4) /Action Plan/Alignment/Downward-Espoused
Definition: "Downward" approach response to direct question about alignment of action plan.

(3 1 5) /Action Plan/Alignment/Upward-Espoused
Definition: "Upward" approach response to direct question about alignment of action plan.

(3 2) /Action Plan/Changes
Definition: Comments indicating that changes have occurred in action plans over the past few years.

(3 3) /Action Plan/Simplification
Definition: Comments indicating the action plans have been simplified over the past few years, either in number or focus.

(3 4) /Action Plan/Relationship
Definition: Indicates a relationship between the action plan and the strategic plan, separate from the notion of alignment.

(3 5) /Action Plan/Goal Not Included
Definition: References to goals that have been the subject of school staff efforts, but were goals that were not included in the year's action plan.

(3 6) /Action Plan/Anything Fits
Definition: Strategic plan goals and objectives are so general that anything written for an action plan goal will fit within the strategic plan.

(3 7) /Action Plan/Role in Schools
Definition: Description of the role of action plans in schools; importance, use, ignorance of, knowledge of, support for.

(3 10) /Action Plan/Goals
Definition: All action plan goals.

(3 10 1) /Action Plan/Goals/1995-96
Definition: All action plan goals for school year 1995-96.

(3 10 2) /Action Plan/Goals/1996-97
Definition: All action plan goals for school year 1996-97.

(3 10 3) /Action Plan/Goals/1997-98
Definition: All action plan goals for school year 1997-98

(3 10 4) /Action Plan/Goals/1998-99
Definition: All action plan goals for school year 1998-99

(3 10 5) /Action Plan/Goals/Growth
Definition: Goal statement is growth-oriented; involves some stretching; not too easily reached; includes a baseline.

(3 10 6) /Action Plan/Goals/Linked
Definition: Goal statement is linked with the strategic plan; consistent with organizational strategies; supports the mission. Sub-nodes code degree of linkage.

(3 10 6 1) /Action Plan/Goals/Linked/Very Low
Definition: Action plan goal statement is linked with one (1) strategic plan objective.

(3 10 6 2) /Action Plan/Goals/Linked/Low
Definition: Action plan goal statement is linked with two (2) strategic plan objectives.

(3 10 6 3) /Action Plan/Goals/Linked/Moderate
Definition: Action plan goal statement is linked with three (3) strategic plan objectives.

(3 10 6 4) /Action Plan/Goals/Linked/High
Definition: Action plan goal statement is linked with four (4) strategic plan objectives.

(3 10 6 5) /Action Plan/Goals/Linked/Very High
Definition: Action plan goal statement is linked with five (5) or more strategic plan objectives.

(3 10 7) /Action Plan/Goals/Measurable
Definition: Goal statement is measurable; observable; concrete; quantifiable over time; includes use of a scale criteria.

(3 10 8) /Action Plan/Goals/Specific
Definition: Goal statement is specific; understandable; what is to be accomplished is simply and accessibly stated; specific time parameters identified.

(3 10 9) /Action Plan/Goals/Standards
Definition: Goal statement includes standard(s); who or what will demonstrate; methods of assessing; conditions in which accomplishment observed; flexible.

(3 10 10) /Action Plan/Goals/Learning
Definition: Goal statement focuses on improvement of student learning.

(4) /Planning
Definition: Planning process, participants, and influences are coded at sub-nodes to this node.

(4 1) /Planning/Process
Definition: Elements and characteristics of the school action planning process are coded at sub-nodes.

(4 1 1) /Planning/Process/Steps
Definition: Indicates steps in school's action planning process.

(4 1 2) /Planning/Process/Timeline
Definition: Indicates timing (year, month, day, elapsed) of steps in the school's action planning process.

(4 1 3) /Planning/Process/Decision Points
Definition: Indicates key process decision points in the school's action planning process.

(4 1 4) /Planning/Process/No Knowlege
Definition: Interviewee indicates no knowledge, or memory, of specific steps or timing of action planning process; coded at sub-nodes.

(4 1 4 1) /Planning/Process/No Knowlege/NK Steps
Definition: Interviewee indicates he/she has no knowledge of (or can't recall) the steps involved in developing the school's action plan.

(4 1 4 2) /Planning/Process/No Knowlege/NK Timeline
Definition: Interviewee indicates he/she has no knowledge of (or can't recall) the timeline involved in developing the school's action plan.

(4 2) /Planning/Participants
Definition: Interviewees indicate person(s) or group(s) participate in action planning at the school, for some reason.

(4 2 1) /Planning/Participants/Teachers
Definition: Teacher(s) as (a) participant(s) in the school's action planning process.

(4 2 2) /Planning/Participants/Parents
Definition: Parent(s) as (a) participant(s) in the school's action planning process. Synonymous with participation through PTA.

(4 2 3) /Planning/Participants/Community
Definition: Community member(s) as (a) participant(s) in the school's action planning process. Broad reference may also include parent(s) in community.

(4 2 4) /Planning/Participants/Committees
Definition: School committee(s) as (a) participant(s) in the school's action planning process. May include teacher, classified, parent, student membership.

(4 2 4 1) /Planning/Participants/Committees/Composition
Definition: Identification of the composition of committees mentioned as participants in the planning process.

(4 2 5) /Planning/Participants/Classified
Definition: Classified school staff as (a) participant(s) in the school's action planning process.

(4 2 6) /Planning/Participants/Students
Definition: Student(s) as (a) participant(s) in the school's action planning process. Includes only references to actual student involvement.

(4 2 7) /Planning/Participants/All Staff
Definition: All staff (teachers, classified) as participants in the school's action planning process. Generally broad, sweeping inclusion.

(4 2 8) /Planning/Participants/School Administration
Definition: School administration (principal, assistants) as (a) participant(s) in school's action planning process.

(4 2 9) /Planning/Participants/Principal's Role
Definition: Specific reference to the principal's role in the action planning process. Source may be principal, teacher, administrator; principal is preferred.

(4 2 10) /Planning/Participants/Students Not
Definition: Students specifically not involved in the school's action planning process.

(4 2 11) /Planning/Participants/Parents Not
Definition: Parents specifically not involved in the school's action planning process.

(4 2 12) /Planning/Participants/Classified Not
Definition: Classified staff specifically not involved in the school's action planning process.

(4 3) /Planning/Influences
Definition: Interviewee indicates an influence on the planning process, or plan contents. Coding is at sub-nodes to this node.

(4 3 1) /Planning/Influences/Strategic Plan
Definition: School district strategic plan is an influence on the school's action planning process/action plan content.

(4 3 2) /Planning/Influences/Central Office
Definition: Central office (board, superintendent, administrators, budget, policies) influence the action plan content/planning process.

(4 3 3) /Planning/Influences/Students
Definition: Students' needs at the school influence the action plan contents/planning process. Exclusive of student participation.

(4 3 4) /Planning/Influences/Teachers
Definition: Teachers influence the action plan contents/planning process (individuals, groups, formally, informally).

(4 3 5) /Planning/Influences/Parents
Definition: Parent influence on the action plan contents/planning process. Parent(s) and PTA/PTSA are synonymous.

(4 3 6) /Planning/Influences/Assessments
Definition: Standards and assessments requirements of district and/or state influence the action plan contents/planning process.

(4 3 7) /Planning/Influences/Educational Designs
Definition: Educational design(s) (Alliance, Atlas) influence action plan contents/planning process (regardless of actual school membership/subscription).

(4 3 8) /Planning/Influences/SLIBG Grant
Definition: SLIBG grant funds/plan process influences action plan contents/planning process.

(4 3 9) /Planning/Influences/Curriculum
Definition: Curriculum implementation influences action plan contents/planning process. May also include general reference to state and/or central office.

(4 3 10) /Planning/Influences/State
Definition: State action, rule, regulation, funds, standards (usually a general reference) as influence on action plan contents/planning process.

(4 3 11) /Planning/Influences/School Administration
Definition: School's administration (principal, vice principal(s), administrative intern(s)) as influence on action plan contents/planning process.

(4 3 12) /Planning/Influences/Community
Definition: Community (member(s)) as influence on action plan contents/planning process. Often overlaps with parent reference; intended to distinguish.

(4 3 13) /Planning/Influences/Beliefs
Definition: Philosophy/beliefs (usually of teachers, school administration) as influence on action plan contents/planning process.

(4 3 14) /Planning/Influences/Colleagues
Definition: Views of, professional standing in the eyes of, colleagues (of teachers) as influence on the action plan contents/planning process.

(4 3 15) /Planning/Influences/Bargained Agreement
Definition: Provisions of teachers' collective bargaining agreement as influence on action plan contents/planning process.

(4 3 16) /Planning/Influences/Shared Decision-making
Definition: Shared decision-making influences the action planning process.

(5) /Priorities
Definition: Sub-nodes contain coding of answers to preliminary questions from second interview protocol.

(5 1) /Priorities/Focus
Definition: Sub-nodes contain coding of answers to "what do you feel the school has accomplished this/past year" second interview preliminary question.

(5 1 1) /Priorities/Focus/Standards
Definition: School has been focusing on state/district standards during past year. Excludes assessment reference.

(5 1 2) /Priorities/Focus/Assessment
Definition: School has been focusing on assessment during the past year. Excludes reference to state/district standards.

(5 1 3) /Priorities/Focus/Technology
Definition: School has been focusing on aspect(s) of technology implementation during past year.

(5 1 4) /Priorities/Focus/Language Arts
Definition: School has been focusing on Language Arts curriculum implementation during past year. Sub-nodes code references to specific curriculum components

(5 1 4 1) /Priorities/Focus/Language Arts/Writing Skills
Definition: School has been focusing on writing skills during the past year.

(5 1 4 2) /Priorities/Focus/Language Arts/Reading Skills
Definition: School has been focusing on reading skills during the past year.

(5 1 4 3) /Priorities/Focus/Language Arts/Six-Trait Writing
Definition: School has been focusing on Six-Trait writing program during the past year.

(5 1 4 4) /Priorities/Focus/Language Arts/First Steps
Definition: School has been focusing on the First Steps spelling program during the past year.

(5 1 4 5) /Priorities/Focus/Language Arts/Second Steps
Definition: School has been focusing on the Second Steps program during the past year.

(5 1 5) /Priorities/Focus/Community Involvement
Definition: School has been focusing in improving community involvement in school during past year.

(5 1 6) /Priorities/Focus/School Community
Definition: School focused on building/improving the school community with students during past year.

(5 1 7) /Priorities/Focus/School Schedule
Definition: School focused on changing the master schedule during past year.

(5 1 8) /Priorities/Focus/Student Discipline
Definition: School focused on improving student discipline/behaviors during past year.

(5 1 9) /Priorities/Focus/School Culture
Definition: Improvement of the school culture (staff) through greater teacher responsibility was a focus during past year.

(5 1 10) /Priorities/Focus/Curriculum Alignment
Definition: School focus on aligning curriculum/standards across grades during past year. Comments emphasize curriculum over performance standards.

(5 1 11) /Priorities/Focus/Decision-making Model
Definition: School focus on improvement of shared decision-making model and model use during past year.

(5 2) /Priorities/Accomplished
Definition: Sub-nodes contain coding of answers to "what the school has accomplished this/past year" second interview preliminary question.

(5 2 1) /Priorities/Accomplished/Culture Shift
Definition: An accomplishment during the past year is a shift, change, or modification in the culture (climate, tone, demeanor) of the school.

(5 2 2) /Priorities/Accomplished/Assessment
Definition: Implementation at school of one or more aspects of state/district assessment structure promoted during past year. Excludes comment on standards.

(5 2 3) /Priorities/Accomplished/Technology
Definition: Implementation during past year of technology equipment, training, materials.

(5 2 4) /Priorities/Accomplished/Community Involvement
Definition: An accomplishment during the past year is development of greater community involvement in the school.

(5 2 5) /Priorities/Accomplished/Facility Remodel
Definition: Surviving a facility remodel is a major accomplishment during the past year.

(5 2 6) /Priorities/Accomplished/Language Arts
Definition: Implementation of some aspect(s) of the district's language arts program during the past year.

(5 2 6 1) /Priorities/Accomplished/Language Arts/Writing Program
Definition: Implementation of some aspect(s) of the district's writing program during the past year.

(5 2 6 2) /Priorities/Accomplished/Language Arts/Reading Program
Definition: Implementation of some aspect(s) of the district's reading program during the past year.

(5 2 8) /Priorities/Accomplished/New Goal Readiness
Definition: Established a readiness on the part of faculty (and possibly classified) for new school action plan goals.

(5 2 9) /Priorities/Accomplished/Standards
Definition: Implementation of some aspect(s) of the state/district curriculum/student achievement standards during past year. Excludes comment on assessment.

(5 2 10) /Priorities/Accomplished/Curriculum Alignment
Definition: Implemented some aspect(s) of curriculum required by district. Distinguished by commentary from standards.

(5 2 11) /Priorities/Accomplished/Set Goals
Definition: Setting of goals by school staff during past year considered an accomplishment. Conveys resistance by staff to accept district planning direction.

(5 2 12) /Priorities/Accomplished/School Community
*** No Definition

(5 2 13) /Priorities/Accomplished/School Schedule
Definition: Revising, or working on revising, the school schedule (blocks, teaming) was an accomplishment during the past year.

(5 2 14) /Priorities/Accomplished/Integration
Definition: Integration of curriculum (teaming, mulitple intelligences) was an accomplishment during the past year.

(5 2 15) /Priorities/Accomplished/No Accomplishments
Definition: No significant accomplishments during the past year.

(5 3) /Priorities/Changes
Definition: Sub-nodes contain coding of answers to "most important changes that have been implemented this/past year" second interview preliminary question.

(5 3 1) /Priorities/Changes/Integration
Definition: Integration of curriculum (teaming, multiple intelligences) during past year was significant change.

(5 3 2) /Priorities/Changes/Teacher Involvement
Definition: Teacher involvement in school decision-making was significant change during past year.

(5 3 3) /Priorities/Changes/Culture Shift
Definition: Shift in the school culture during the past year is significant change.

(5 3 4) /Priorities/Changes/Math Program
Definition: Implementation of the district math program is a significant change during the past year.

(5 3 5) /Priorities/Changes/Facility Remodel
Definition: Remodel of school facility was signficant change at school during past year.

(5 3 6) /Priorities/Changes/No Changes
Definition: No changes of significance were implemented at the school during past year.

(5 3 7) /Priorities/Changes/School Schedule
Definition: Revising the school schedule (particularly creating time blocks) was significant change during past year.

(5 3 8) /Priorities/Changes/Technology
Definition: Implementation of technology as learning facilitator was significant change during past year.

(5 3 9) /Priorities/Changes/Language Arts
Definition: Implementing district language arts program was a significant change during past year. General reference; specific references coded at sub-nodes.

(5 3 9 1) /Priorities/Changes/Language Arts/Reading Program
Definition: Implementation of district reading program was a significant change during the past year.

(5 3 9 4) /Priorities/Changes/Language Arts/Writing Assessment
Definition: Implementation of writing curriculum standards, instruction, and assessment was significant change during past year.

(5 3 10) /Priorities/Changes/Administration
Definition: Change in administration at the school is was a significant change during the past year.

(5 3 11) /Priorities/Changes/Faculty Advisory
Definition: Implementing a faculty advisory (committee) is a significant change during the past year.

(5 3 12) /Priorities/Changes/Teacher Mentoring
Definition: Implementation of teacher mentoring was a significant change at the school during the past year.

(5 3 13) /Priorities/Changes/Standards
Definition: Implementation of standards was a significant change at the school during the past year.

(5 3 14) /Priorities/Changes/Committee Structure
Definition: Revising committee structure and assignments was a significant change during the past year.

(6) /Decision-making Model
Definition: Sub-nodes refer to existence, non-existence, use, non-use, characteristics, comments, expectations of shared decision-making models.

(6 1) /Decision-making Model/Model Exists
Definition: Indicates the school has developed a shared decision-making model. Includes also comments referencing the district decision-making model.

(6 2) /Decision-making Model/Model Not Exist
Definition: Indicates that the school has not developed a shared decision-making model.

(6 3) /Decision-making Model/Model Use
Definition: Indicates use of the school decision-making model. Also indicates use of the district decision-making model.

(6 4) /Decision-making Model/Model Not Used
Definition: Indicates the school decision-making model is not used.

(6 5) /Decision-making Model/Shared Decision-making
Definition: General comments about shared decision-making or decision-making model(s).

(6 6) /Decision-making Model/Central Office
Definition: Principal involvement at the central office in district-level shared decision-making.

(6 7) /Decision-making Model/Expectations
Definition: Central office expectations (board, superintendent, executive administration) of existence and use of shared decision-making models at schools.

(7) /Strategic Plan
Definition: The entire strategic plan is coded here. Sub-nodes code the goals and objectives of the strategic plan; process of plan development.

(7 1) /Strategic Plan/Standards
Definition: Goal 1: Establish high standards.

(7 1 1) /Strategic Plan/Standards/Behavior
Definition: Objective 1.1: Expect respectful and responsible behavior.

(7 1 2) /Strategic Plan/Standards/Core Competencies
Definition: objective 1.2: Identify and teach core competencies for each subject.

(7 1 3) /Strategic Plan/Standards/Assess Students
Definition: Objective 1.3: Set high academic standards and assess students using a variety of methods.

(7 1 4) /Strategic Plan/Standards/Continually Improve
Definition: Objective 1.4: Monitor and continually improve the standards and assessment process.

(7 1 5) /Strategic Plan/Standards/Diversity Programs
Definition: Objective 1.5: Expand and improve programs to increase awareness and appreciation of racial, cultural and individual diversity.

(7 2) /Strategic Plan/Learning
Definition: Goal 2: Focus on student learning.

(7 2 1) /Strategic Plan/Learning/Instructional Methods
Definition: Objective 2.1: Explore, implement and assess a variety of instructional methods to ensure all students succeed at their highest level.

(7 2 2) /Strategic Plan/Learning/Integrated Curricula
Definition: Objective 2.2: Develop and implement integrated curricula based on established high standards.

(7 2 3) /Strategic Plan/Learning/Integrate Technology
Definition: Objective 2.3: Integrate technology into the curriculum to enhance learning and teaching.

(7 2 4) /Strategic Plan/Learning/Workplace Skills
Definition: Objective 2.4: Teach skills that transfer into a diverse workplace and society.

(7 2 5) /Strategic Plan/Learning/Flexible Time-Space
Definition: Objective 2.5: Provide opportunities for flexible use of time and locations to enhance student learning.

(7 2 6) /Strategic Plan/Learning/Assess Instruction
Definition: Objective 2.6: Assess instructional programs and delivery processes.

(7 3) /Strategic Plan/Decision-making
Definition: Goal 3: Increase public involvement in decision-making.

(7 3 1) /Strategic Plan/Decision-making/Involving Constituencies
Definition: Objective 3.1: Develop strategies and processes for involving parents, students, community and staff in school and district decision-making.

(7 3 2) /Strategic Plan/Decision-making/Expectations
Definition: Objective 3.2: Set clear standards, roles and responsibilities for decision-making.

(7 3 3) /Strategic Plan/Decision-making/Models-Training
Definition: Objective 3.3: Provide models and training for collaborative decision-making.

(7 3 4) /Strategic Plan/Decision-making/Communication System
Definition: Objective 3.4: Ensure an effective communication system.

(7 4) /Strategic Plan/Support Systems
Definition: Goal 4: Provide high quality support systems.

(7 4 1) /Strategic Plan/Support Systems/Action Plans
Definition: Objective 4.1: Develop and coordinate action plans for all district departments and schools in accordance with the strategic plan.

(7 4 2) /Strategic Plan/Support Systems/District Support
Definition: Objective 4.2: Provide district support for action plans of departments and schools.

(7 4 3) /Strategic Plan/Support Systems/Service Improvement
Definition: Objective 4.3: Continually monitor and improve delivery of all services.

(7 4 4) /Strategic Plan/Support Systems/Staff Development
Definition: Objective 4.4: Provide training, support and recognition for staff.

(7 5) /Strategic Plan/Community Collaboration
Definition: Goal 5: Collaborate with community resources.

(7 5 1) /Strategic Plan/Community Collaboration/Expectations
Definition: Objective 5.1: Develop clear standards, expectations, roles and responsibilities for involvement.

(7 5 2) /Strategic Plan/Community Collaboration/Partnership Building
Definition: Objective 5.2: Build partnerships with businesses, government and other organizations.

(7 5 3) /Strategic Plan/Community Collaboration/Volunteer Use
Definition: Objective 5.3: Utilize volunteers and community services to enhance learning.

(7 5 4) /Strategic Plan/Community Collaboration/Partnerships System
Definition: Objective 5.4: Develop a system to administer, coordinate and evaluate partnerships.

(7 5 5) /Strategic Plan/Community Collaboration/Partnerships Recognition
Definition: Objective 5.5: Promote awareness and recognition of partnerships.

(7 6) /Strategic Plan/Process Involvement
Definition: Personal involvement in the process used to develop the district strategic plan.

(7 7) /Strategic Plan/Strategies General
Definition: General comments on the strategies contained within the strategic plan; not appropriately coded elsewhere; provide view of interviewee's attitude.

(D) //Document Annotations

(F) //Free Nodes

(F 1) //Free Nodes/Site Council
Definition: Reference to existence, need for, formation of, acts by a school committee designated as or similar to a site council.

(F 3) //Free Nodes/Best Quotes
Definition: Excellent interviewee quotes; not specific to a particular topic.

Q.S.R. NUD*IST Power version, revision 4.0. Code Definitions-NUD*IST (3)
Licensee: Gary D. Cohn, 12:53 pm, Mar 19, 1999.

Appendix H: Methodology: Transcription Rules

The following instructions were provided to the interview tape transcriber to describe the characteristics of prepared transcript files.

1. Set the margins at 1 inch on all sides.
2. Hard return at the conclusion of each sentence.
3. Left justify with a ragged right margin.
4. Begin the document with a title that contains the name of the interviewee, the word "interview," and the date of the interview.
5. Introduce each speaker with their first name only, followed by a colon (":"), and a hard return.
6. Whenever using ellipses ("...") to signify pauses or shifts in a response that doesn't end a sentence, put one space on either side of the ellipse (" ... ").
7. Enclose noise comments, such as "laughter, " or "phone rings" between single brackets ("[laughter]"), not parentheses or braces.
8. Put all numbers in numeric format. Dollar amounts should be preceded by a dollar sign (and not followed by the word "dollars").
9. Where there is unintelligible conversation insert 3 question marks followed by the tape meter reading. Precede the question marks with a space, and insert a space between the question marks and the meter number (" ??? 406 ").

Sentence structure, or the determination of where sentences were broken, potentially impacts analysis, or at least ease of coding for analysis. Sentences division decisions were reviewed at the time the transcripts were either verified word-for-word, or during the first coding review. Changes in sentence breaks were made where, in the judgment of the interviewer, thoughts were more appropriately combined into one sentence.

Appendix I: Methodology: Transcript Preparation

The following steps detail the preparatory process used to ready the raw transcript files for the analysis process.

1. Voice recordings were delivered to the transcriptionist, who used the *Transcription Instructions* (Appendix H: Transcription Rules) to guide in making necessary decisions in the transcribing.
2. Each raw transcript was received on diskette and labeled with the name of the interviewee and the date of the interview, which information was also contained in the first lines of the transcript.
3. The diskette content was copied to the main system hard drive, and a copy of transcript was made bearing a common label format: Last Name, First Name, "I-" and the interview date in year, month, day format (Doe, Jane I-19970622).
4. The file label was made consistent, and limited to one line at the top of the document (Jane Doe Interview June 22, 1997).
5. All blank lines were removed.
6. All double spaces were removed.
7. All extra spaces before paragraph marks were removed.
8. All interviewer and interviewee labels preceeding statements were preceeded with an asterisk to assist in the NUD*IST analysis process.
9. Each question was preceeded with a label denoting its question number from the interview protocol. For example, Question I. A. was preceeded on a separate line with "*Question I.A." to assist NUD*IST in locating and extracting similar questions across interviews. The preliminary questions from the second principal interviews were preceeded with labels indicating so ("*Question P-A.", etc.).
10. A variety of grammatical corrections were made to the contents for standardization purposes.
    a) Proper names were corrected when in error.
    b) "District" replaced "district" when referring to the Southcoast School District.
    c) "SLIBG" replaced "SLG", or "SLIG".
    d) "Title I" replaced "Title One".
    e) "Inservice" replaced "inservice".
    f) "WASL" replaced "Wassel" or "Wassell".
11. Each sentence was reviewed to ensure that it was followed by a hard return, in effect creating a new paragraph. This structures the interview data for analysis at the sentence level using NUD*IST.

12. A random sample of the transcripts was selected for transcription reliability testing.
13. Transcription errors were reviewed and corrected by the interviewer to establish clarity. All transcripts were reviewed for difficult-to-understand passages (marked by the transcriptionist with three question marks and the tape counter number), and those passages corrected or marked unintelligible. Unintelligible passages were eliminated from subsequent analysis.
14. The transcripts were converted to "text only" format, copied into the NUD*IST Rawfiles folder, and imported into NUD*IST for coding and further analysis.

Appendix J: Methodology: Transcription Reliability Analysis

The following steps detail the process used to assess the prepared transcript files for transcription reliability.

1. An Excel spreadsheet was created with the name and date of each transcript listed in alphabetic order by name. The date of interview determined the order of interviews of the same person (e.g., "Doe, Jane I-19970622" preceeded "Doe, Jane I-19980815").
2. A cell adjacent to the first transcript identifier was filled with an Excel random number generation function ("RAND"). This function generates a number between zero and one.
3. Additional formula operators were added to the "RAND" function (the random number result was multiplied by 100, e.g., RAND*100), and the display format set to whole numbers, to produce a display number between one and 100.
4. The formula was copied to cells adjacent to all interview identifiers.
5. The recalculation feature was initiated, resulting in new random numbers for each transcript.
6. The random number produced by the formula was copied and pasted, using the paste/special/numbers command, over the cells containing the random number generation formula. This replaced the formula with the random number produced by the formula, ensuring the number would not be changed due to spreadsheet recalculations which normally occur when data are sorted, spreadsheets saved, etc.
7. The cells containing the transcript identifiers and their random numbers were sorted in ascending numeric order using the sort command.
8. A formula was created in the cell adjacent to the random number assigned the first transcript. The formula counted the number of transcripts on its line and those above, and divided by the total number of transcript. The result indicated what percent that transcript, and all those that preceed it, constitute of the universe of transcripts (e.g., the first of 30 transcripts is three percent of the total, the second and first are six percent of the total).
9. The first six transcripts consititute a 20 percent sample of the universe of 30 transcripts.
10. The first six transcripts were reviewed word-by-word to establish a reliability rating for the transcriptions. In addition, two more tapes were tested due to interviewer concerns about a poor recording environment and multiple simultaneous respondents in a group interview setting.

11. Reliability was calculated as total errors divided by total words times 100, the result of which is subtracted from 100.
12. The reliability rate of each of the randomly selected tapes exceeded 95 percent; the overall reliability rate was 98.19 percent for the randomly selected sample of six tapes. The reliability rates of the additional transcripts were 99.49 percent and 99.08 percent respectively, resulting in an overall reliability rate of 98.48 percent for a 27 percent sample of transcripts.

Appendix K: Methodology: Transcript Coding Process

The following steps detail the process used to code the prepared transcripts with the NUD*IST program.

1. The *Preliminary Code Structure* (research proposal) was reviewed following two complete readings of the transcripts for accuracy and re-familiarization. The code structure was re-organized into groupings associated with research questions. Key codes, or those most general and directly related to the questions, were applied to transcripts during the first coding process.
2. The first coding process was applied to principal interviews, first the early interview and then the later interview. As the interviews were coded, the list of new codes was expanded. At the conclusion of each session during the initial coding process, a current version of the codes was printed and retained with the interviews.
3. At the conclusion of the initial coding process, the codes were reviewed and preliminary definitions written.
4. The principal interviews were then subjected to a second coding process to apply any new codes and to refine the applications of existing codes to the interviews, based upon the development of the definitions. This step was a sentence by sentence review of the code applications.
5. Next the central office interviews were reviewed and coded using the existing code structure (see 12/6/98 code listing report).
6. Each of the codes constitutes a "node" in the NUD*IST analysis package. Each node was reviewed to determine if the sentences coded at that node fit the definition of the code. In instances where the data fit the definition, but there were instances where small portions of the data did not, those code applications to interview data were deleted where they no longer met the definition. In instances where the definition generally fit the data, but where the definition seemed not to describe the data well enough, code definitions were refined to better fit the interview data.
7. Steps two through five were repeated for the teacher interviews.

The matrix following shows the *original* structure resulting from key code selection (research proposal) and categorization of the codes by research question.

Transcript Coding Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Questions							Doc.
	I.A.	I.B.	I.C.	II.A.	II.B.	II.C.	II.D.	C.A.
I.A. How do principals develop action plans?				3-1* 4-1		3-2		4-1 4-2
I.B. Why do principals use the planning method they describe?	4-2 4-3					3-2 4-2 4-3		
I.C. In what ways are the characteristics of action planning as described by principals and key teachers comparable to a selected model described in relevant strategic planning literature?			4-1	4-1	4-2			
I.D. In what sense do principals perceive school action plan goals and activities to be related to district strategic goals and objectives?		3-1 3-3 3-4 4-3					3-1 3-3 3-4 4-3	
I.E. How do principals characterize the alignment of school action plan goals to district strategic goals and objectives?							3-1 4-3	
I.F. How do key teachers or other school staff involved in the planning process describe developing and aligning school goals to district goals and objectives?				3-1 4-1 4-2 4-3			3-1 4-1 4-2 4-3	
II.A. Is there a positive correlation between school sites' action plan goals and activities and the strategic plan goals and objectives?								7-1 - 7-5
II.B. Are there significant differences between the action plan goals and activities created by principals who describe an upward versus a downward approach to action plan alignment?		3-1 3-3 3-4 4-3					3-1 3-3 3-4 4-3	7-1 - 7-5

**Numeric indicators refer to the coding structure at the second level.*

Appendix L: Methodology: Action Plan Process Development

The following steps detail the process used to prepared the flow process diagrams which illustrate the steps and timeline used at each school for creating the 1998-99 action plan.

1. After all principal interviews were coded, a NUD*IST Matrix report was run to extract references to action planning steps, timeline, and key decision points by school. The principal interview extracts were analyzed for specific steps and dates of occurrence. Each report was reviewed and a hand-written outline was constructed on a note page for each school. Then the report was checked for timeline data to verify where possible the steps and to add the months during which the steps occurred. Red underlines mark the specific words used to develop a preliminary flow chart.
2. The documents collected from each school were reviewed for references to planning steps, dates, outcomes, invitations to participate or reports of meetings. Pertinent portions were highlighted. The hand-written outlines were revised in accordance with the data extracted from the documents. Red codes mark the specific words used to develop a preliminary flow chart.
3. From each hand-written outline a first draft flow chart diagram was constructed for each school using PowerPoint.
4. A brief, step-by-step narrative was created for each school to verbally describe the planning process.
5. A diagram copy was mailed to the principal to whose school it applied with a memo requesting him or her to review it and edit as appropriate. In instances where process was unclear, steps were included with question marks to indicate confusion over data.
6. Principals returned the initial diagrams with edits and/or approvals depending upon the accuracy of the diagrams from their perspectives.
7. A second version of each diagram was created using the principal's input.
8. The NUD*IST Matrix reports (planning steps, timeline, key decision points) were re-run to include the teacher interviews.
9. The second version of the diagram was compared to the principal's comments a second time, and each step referenced on the matrix report print-out.
10. Then the diagram was compared to the teachers' comments and each diagram step referenced on the matrix report print-out.
11. Next the school documents were compared to the diagram and the specific references in the documents coded on the document, and then referenced on the diagram.

12. A third version of each diagram was created and printed for the report notebook, and a diagram copy was mailed to the principal to whose school it applies with a memo requesting him or her to review it and edit as appropriate. In all instances the steps narrative was included with question marks to indicate any questions that remained about data.
13. Each school's narrative was then revised to include the comments of each principals, which was compared with the teacher interviews and documents again to explain the process in as much detail as was available from the documents and interviews.
14. The diagrams and narratives were then used to compare process steps across schools, create a generic process from commonality, and conduct the comparison to the model selected from the literature review.

Appendix M: Methodology: Action Plan Criteria Development

A significant aspect of action plan analysis was identifying the structural characteristics of action plan goals established by the schools. There was not within the literature reviewed for this research any particular process or model described for establishing operational plans advanced by the authors. Nor was there a model for assessing operations plans, per se. In an effort to construct criteria for labeling the characteristics of the action plans, three authorities on strategic planning were consulted for tactical plan characteristics. Mauriel (1989) provided five criteria for goals established to effect instructional improvement:

1. Be attainable, or realistic;
2. Involve some stretching;
3. Be broad enough to be significant to the district's future, yet specific enough to be observable and measurable;
4. Have specific time parameters and methods for assessing progress;
5. Be well communicated, understood, and in general acceptable to those who must carry them out (p. 240).

Steiner (1979) provided ten guides for long-range objectives established under his strategic planning model. Steiner advised that these guides were not offered in any order of priority, nor should they be viewed as mutually exclusive:

1. Suitable: achievement must support the mission;
2. Measurable: express concrete, quantifiable achievement over time;
3. Feasible: realistic, practical, possible achievement;
4. Acceptable: supported by organizational members;
5. Flexible: modifiable in the face of unforeseen circumstances;
6. Motivating: not too easily reached to depress desire;
7. Understandable: simply and accessibly stated;
8. Commitment: owned by membership once agreed upon;
9. Participative: membership had authentic role in developing;
10. Linkage: consistent with organizational strategies (adapted from pp. 165-167).

Finally, Kaufman (1995) provided four criteria for judging the essential elements of any objective (which, at the tactical level Kaufman labeled a "micro-level mission objective"):

1. What is to be accomplished;
2. Who or what will demonstrate the accomplishment;
3. Under what conditions the accomplishment will be observed;
4. What criteria (ideally interval or ratio scales) will be used (p. 129).

In order to establish a set of criteria for describing the characteristics of the schools' action plan goals, the criteria provided by Steiner, Mauriel, and Kaufman were analyzed for basic features that they have in common. Each criterion was labeled and the list sorted by the categories. The similar categories were then reviewed and revised again. Table 24 displays the result of the analysis. All of the goal criterion statements are associated with a label identifying the key characteristic that the criterion has in common with other criteria.

Table 24
Goal Criteria Commonality

Common Label	Goal Criterion Statements
Acceptable	Be well communicated, understood, and in general acceptable to those who must carry them out
Acceptable	Commitment: owned by membership once agreed upon
Acceptable	Participative: membership had authentic role in developing
Acceptable	Supported by organizational members
Attainable	Be attainable, or realistic
Attainable	Feasible: realistic, practical, possible achievement
Growth	Involve some stretching
Growth	Motivating: not too easily reached to depress desire
Linked	Consistent with organizational strategies
Linked	Suitable: achievement must support the mission
Measurable	Be broad enough to be significant to the district's future, yet specific enough to be observable and measurable
Measurable	Express concrete, quantifiable achievement over time
Measurable	What criteria (ideally interval or ratio scales) will be used
Specific	Understandable: simply and accessibly stated
Specific	What is to be accomplished
Standard	Flexible: modifiable in the face of unforeseen circumstances
Standard	Have specific time parameters and methods for assessing progress
Standard	Under what conditions the accomplishment will be observed
Standard	Who or what will demonstrate the accomplishment

From the common labels in Table 24 a summary list of seven goal criteria was established.

1. Acceptable
2. Attainable
3. Growth

4. Linked
5. Measurable
6. Specific
7. Standard

Two of these criteria may be disposed of by reason of their assessment by the organizational members who adopted them. That the goal statement was adopted by the school serves as an indication that it was judged acceptable (item 1) and attainable (item 2) by the school staff and the central office administration.

Definitions synthesized from the three authors' descriptions were then attached to the summary labels.

1. Growth: Involve some stretching; not too easily reached; a baseline is established.
2. Linked: Consistent with organizational strategies; must support the mission.
3. Measurable: Observable; concrete, quantifiable over time; scale criteria used.
4. Specific: Understandable; what is to be accomplished simply and accessibly stated; specific time parameters.
5. Standard: Flexible, modifiable; who or what will demonstrate accomplishment; methods for assessing; conditions under which accomplishment will be observed.

To this list of five remaining criteria was added the additional central office criteria of student-related goals, i.e., goals focused upon the improvement of student learning. During the analysis for this study, codes were applied to the goals if they met the remaining expert criteria: growth, measurability, specificity, and standards of attainment. Measurability and growth (learning improvement) also were criteria described by central office administrators and principals.

Appendix N: Methodology: Action Plan Statistical Treatment Preparation

Relationships to the Strategic Plan

Table 22, Planning Approach Relationship to Strategic and Action Plan Attributes, displays data derived to implement a chi square test of the difference between the principal's approach to alignment and number of strategic plan goals addressed by the school's action plan. Drawing from Table 19, the number of strategic plan goals addressed by all action plan goals in a school's action plan were summed. The average number of strategic plan goals addressed by an action plan was 5.5. Each action plan was then coded as having few goals if it contained five or fewer strategic plan goal links, or many if it contained six or more strategic plan goal links. Then the plans were sorted by upward or downward approach into the cells depicted in Tables 22.

The second part of Table 22, Planning Approach Relationship to Strategic and Action Plan Attributes, displays data derived to implement a chi square test of the difference between the principal's approach to alignment and number of strategic plan objectives addressed by the school's action plan. Drawing from Table 19, the number of strategic plan objectives addressed by all action plan goals in a school's action plan were summed. The average number of strategic plan objectives addressed by an action plan was 7.5. Each action plan was then coded as having few goals if it contained seven or fewer strategic plan goal links, or many if it contained eight or more strategic plan goal links. Then the plans were sorted by upward or downward approach into the cells in Table 22. Next the chi square analysis was performed using processes described in *SYSTAT: Statistics, version 5.2 edition.*

Relationships to Approaches

The third part of Table 22, Planning Approach Relationship to Strategic and Action Plan Attributes, displays data derived to implement a chi square test of the difference between the principal's approach to alignment and the number of action plan goals established in each school's action plan. Drawing from Table 19, the number of action plan goals in a school's action plan were summed. The average number of action plan goals contained in an action plan was 2.5. Each action plan was then coded as having few goals if it contained two or fewer action plan goals, or many if it contained three or more action plan goals. Then the plans were sorted by upward or downward approach into the cells in Table 22. Next the chi square analysis was performed using processes described in *SYSTAT: Statistics, version 5.2 edition*

The third part of Table 22, Planning Approach Relationship to Strategic and Action Plan Attributes, displays data derived to implement a chi square test of the difference between the principal's approach to alignment and number of action plan goal criteria met by all the goals in the school's action plan. Drawing from Table 18, the number of action plan goal criteria met by all action plan goals in a school's action plan were summed. The average number of action plan goal criteria met by an action plan's goals was 8. Each action plan was then coded as having few goals if it met action plan goal criteria, or many if it met nine or more action plan goal criteria. Then the plans were sorted by upward or downward approach into the cells in Table 22. Next the chi square analysis was performed using processes described in *SYSTAT: Statistics, version 5.2 edition*

Table 23, Planning Approach Relationship to Action Plan Goal Type, displays the frequency with which the principal's approach to alignment was associated with action plan goal types addressed by the school's action plan. Drawing from Table 19, the subject of action plan goals in a school's action plan were divided into two groups, those that addressed academic subjects versus nonacademic subjects. Academic goal subjects directly specified curriculum areas of math, writing, English, spelling, reading, or the WASL (which covers a selection of curriculum areas). Nonacademic subjects were technology (an integrating subject), community, discipline, training (of staff in these cases), quality self-assessment, and responsibility (completing assignments). Then, the goals were sorted by upward or downward approach into the cells in Table 23.

Appendix O: District Strategic Plan

SOUTHCOAST SCHOOL DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN 1995-2000

Mission Statement
Southcoast: Strengthening Our Community Through Excellence in Education

Goal 1
Establish High Standards

Objective 1.1
Expect respectful and responsible behavior

Objective 1.2
Identify and teach core competencies for each subject.

Objective 1.3
Set high academic standards and assess students using a variety of methods.

Objective 1.4
Monitor and continually improve the standards and assessment process.

Objective 1.5
Expand and improve programs to increase awareness and appreciation of racial, cultural and individual diversity.

Goal 2
Focus on Student Learning

Objective 2.1
Explore, implement and assess a variety of instructional methods to ensure all student succeed at their highest level.

Objective 2.2
Develop and implement integrated curricula based on established high standards.

Objective 2.3
Integrate technology into the curriculum to enhance learning and teaching.

Objective 2.4
Teach skills that transfer into a diverse workplace and society.

Objective 2.5
Provide opportunities for flexible use of time and locations to enhance student learning.

Objective 2.6
Assess instructional programs and delivery processes.

Goal 3
Increase Public Involvement in Decision Making

Objective 3.1
Develop strategies and processes for involving parents, students, community and staff in school and district decision making.

Objective 3.2
Set clear standards, expectations, roles and responsibilities for decision making.

Objective 3.3
Provide models and training for collaborative decision making.

Objective 3.4
Ensure an effective communication system.

Goal 4
Provide High Quality Support Systems

Objective 4.1
Develop and coordinate Action Plans for all district departments and schools in accordance with the Strategic Plan.

Objective 4.2
Provide district support for Action Plans of departments and schools.

Objective 4.3
Continually monitor and improve delivery of all services.

Objective 4.4
Provide training, support and recognition for staff.

Goal 5
Collaborate with Community Resources

Objective 5.1
Develop clear standards, expectations, roles and responsibilities for involvement.

Objective 5.2
Build partnerships with businesses, government and other organizations.

Objective 5.3
Utilize volunteers and community services to enhance learning.

Objective 5.4
Develop a system to administer, coordinate and evaluate partnerships.

Objective 5.5
Promote awareness and recognition of partnerships.

Appendix P: School Action Plan Goals 1998-99

School	Goal Statement
River-Hill	1. By June-1999, reduce to no greater than 15% those students scoring at Level-1 on the 4th-grade WASL Math tests; and, by June-1999, increase the total percentage of students on or above standard in Math to 55% on the 4th-grade WASL. (now at 37%)
Valley	1. To continue to implement and improve strategies for student learning through the integration of technology in the classroom.
	2. To enhance student understanding of their role as part of their school and community.
	3. To plan and implement effective student learning in Language-Arts, as pertains to the Learning-Standards-and-Assessments. Year-2 target: 5% growth at all grade levels against March-1998 scores on school-wide writing assessment.
	4. To plan and implement effective student learning in Math as pertains to the Learning-Standards-and-Assessment.
Panorama	1. Panorama will meet its technology goal by teaching the integrated use of the skills documented in our technology curriculum plan with 80% school-wide mastery.
	2. To invite parent, student, staff, and community involvement and increase awareness through: 1) a Community-Fair; 2) Family-Nights; 3) Community-Service-Projects; and 4) distribution of a Community Flier.
	3. Work toward alignment with current NSSD Language-Arts Writing-standards. Objective: To insure consistent progression of Writing skills for all Panorama students.
Eastview	1. Increase to 50% the number of students performing at or above standard in Spelling on the 4th-grade WASL in the Spring-1999.
	2. Increase to 50% the students meeting standard on the 4th-grade WASL to be given in the Spring-1999.

Vista-Junior	1. Establish a committee of parents, teachers, and students to examine the school climate and discipline systems at Vista-Junior.
	2. Team of 6 Vista-Junior teachers attend OSPI practitioners' workshop at Port Ludlow, October-1998.
	3. Send teachers to Technology-Development-Center; take classes offered via district in-service in e-mail, multi-media, web pages, Internet basics, and Claris-Works; provide after school service at Vista-Junior.
	4. In-service of special education department in reading (accelerated reader grant money). In-service of staff on special education accommodations issues for the regular education teacher. Goals 2000 Summer-Literacy-Institute.
Eastbay-Junior	1. To increase the Reading level by 1-1/2 grade levels, of 80% of our 7th-grade students diagnosed at 5th-grade level or below.
Seascape-Junior	1. Design and implement a student quality awareness and assessment process.
	2. To increase by 5% the number of completed assignments submitted for assessment in all Seascape-Junior classes as measured by baseline data for 8th-grade, 9th-grade from 5/15/98 to 6/18/99 and from 10/15/98 to 5/15/99 for 7th-grade.
	3. To increase the Reading level by 1-1/2 grade levels of 80% of our students diagnosed at 5th-grade level or below.

Source: Southcoast School District School Action Plans 1998-99.

Appendix Q: River Hill Process Narrative

Planning Process

Step 1: Assessment Team training. The purpose of this step was to analyze assessment data collected from the school's students, to determine a problem area or areas, and to develop potential goal statements to bring back to the school. The training participants, referred to as the Planning for Results Team, were four teachers, a parent, and the principal. The team was selected through a solicitation of volunteers.

Liz:

We sent a team to the Planning for Results Training by the National Alliance. 93 This team was open to anybody on this staff, so it was a voluntary team. 92 And at that three-day training, they analyzed all of our assessment data that we've collected over the last two years - CTBS, the WASL scores, our fall and spring assessment, classroom assessment - they had all of that with them and they analyzed that came up with a potential goal for the 1998-99 school year. 94 The goal that they came up with at this three-day training was based on all of their assessment of our data. 112 So, basically, they identified an area of need based on our scores. 113

Honey:

I went to a training along with two other staff members for two days. Before the training we were asked to bring school data, test scores, official types of materials that we had. 157 And so during the workshop we analyzed the data that our school had in trying to find something that we could then write a measurable goal or performance for the next year. 158 And so, we worked to develop a performance goal that related to math. 162 And then we brought it back to the staff. 163

Step 2: Assessment Team and small group meetings. The planning-related purposes of this step were (a) to determine an approach to introducing the goal to the rest of the staff, and (b) to determine if the math goal recommendation to the entire staff was acceptable. Participants were faculty who attended the training and those the Planning for Results Team could include in the small group meetings.

Honey:

The three of us that had attended that January workshop took a half-day release time about March. We met in one of the conference rooms here at school, and we said, "Okay, what is our strategy for getting this whole process to the staff in a way that they understand how we arrived at this goal that could be a potential school goal?" 362

We met in small groups, talking to the staff about the process that we had gone through in the workshop. 164 We met in small groups so that the staff was up to date on what the workshop, workshop had been and the process that we had to go through to arrive at that. 291 We tried to sort of prepare the staff for the bigger staff meeting. 292

Step 3: School staff meeting. The planning-related purpose of this step was to discuss the goal recommendation from the Assessment Team (Planning for Results Team). This was an introductory session at which a decision was not expected. Participants at this staff meeting include principal, teacher, and classified. Parents were invited to attend.

Liz:

They [Assessment Team] brought the results of their work to our staff meeting and suggested a goal based on all of their work. 108 And at that staff meeting, there was discussion and debate about the goal. 139 No consensus. 140 And we announced that at the next staff meeting there would be a consensus vote on the goal. 141 So, we gave the staff information, we allowed discussion, and then we allowed a month of time to kind of think about this as the goal. 142

Honey:

Eventually we brought it to a staff meeting and at that meeting we presented it, it was open for discussion. And it led to a vote, a consensus vote on our goals. 165 After those small groups came a staff meeting, not with Wendy Byrds, a staff meeting to decide on whether we wanted that as our goal. 297

Step 4: School staff meeting. The planning-related purpose of this step was to arrive at a decision using the consensus voting process. The staff decision was to adopt the math goal recommendation. Participants were teachers and classified staff. All attendees were eligible to vote including parents. This meeting followed approximately a month of opportunity for intraschool discussion by school staff of the math goal recommendation proposed at the previous staff meeting.

Liz:

At the next staff meeting we had consensus. 143

Charm:

And at the end of that meeting, there was a consensus vote that adopted the goal they had originally created. 199

Step 5: Inservice committee meeting. The planning-related purpose of this step was to determine process for developing activities supportive of accomplishing goal adopted at previous step; attendees included the teacher and parent members of the committee and the principal. The result was a decision to hire Wendy Byrds from the district's central office to conduct a staff training and processing session at the upcoming staff meeting.

Liz:

We agreed at our inservice meeting to hire Wendy Byrds to come and help us define strategies to reach the goal. 144

Step 6: School staff meeting. The planning-related purpose of this step was to generate action plan activities (referred to by the principal and the staff as "strategies") for the action plan goal. Participants included the principal, teachers, classified employees, and parents. Wendy Byrds, the school district's director of staff development, strategic planning, and grants, was brought in to facilitate the group process brainstorming sessions. The staff was divided into groups at five tables in accordance with the five goals of the strategic plan. This was to help focus strategy development within the five strategic goal areas. The result was production of 30 - 60 activities which were referred to a volunteer task force for synthesis.

Liz:

So then Wendy was at a staff meeting, and we brainstormed strategies at that staff meeting. 145 She took our goal that we had already reached consensus on, and we brainstormed strategies. 146 So then from that meeting a group of staff volunteered to take a look at our strategies and come up with maybe five or six strategies that would really help us reach our goal, just to kind of process all those strategies. 206 'Cause I think we came out of that staff meeting with about 30 brainstorm strategies - all in each of the five areas of the strategic plan. 207

Charm:

Then we hired a facilitator who came in to do some work with our staff, the whole staff meeting, on generating some strategies that we could use to achieve our goal. So we broke up into groups and we came up with, maybe 50 or 60 various strategies. 201

Honey:

So once we had voted and come up with a consensus vote on what our goal was going to be, then Wendy Byrds came in, knowing what our goal already was. 305

Step 7: Strategies Task Force meeting. The purpose of the step was to process school staff (including parent) input at the school staff meeting at which action plan activity ideas were generated. Task force participants included teachers, one classified, the principal, and three parents. The task force selected five activities to recommend to the school staff for the action plan.

Liz:

Then that group met, and there were two or three parents also involved in that group. 212 That group met for a whole afternoon. 213 And, we narrowed down the strategies to, I think, five strategies. 214

Honey:

And of course, there we were again. 239 We were part of that group. 240 And what we did in that group, we met one afternoon. 241 We had two parents that also met with us. 242 And we took this kind of hodge podge of strategies that the staff had come up with when we had Wendy Byrds here. 243 And we prioritized. 247 We rated them. 248 We went through a process that had us come out with our top strategies. 249

Step 8: School staff meeting. The planning-related purpose of this step was to discuss math strategies with parents and to gather input from parents prior to making a staff decision on the strategies. The meeting was announced in the principal's newsletter.

Step 9: School staff meeting. The planning-related purpose of this step was to hold a consensus vote on the action plan activities recommended by the Strategies Task Force. Participants included the principal, teachers, classified employees, and parent volunteers. The result was adoption of the activities recommended by the task force.

Liz:

And then we brought that [five strategies] back to our staff meeting. 215 And that was advertised ahead of time. 216 They had the strategies that we reached agreement on ahead of time, and we did announce it would be a consensus vote at that staff meeting. 217

Honey:

And then those were presented back to the staff, and adopted as strategies that we would use to meet our goal for next year. 250

Step 10: Standards and Assessment Committee Chair. The chair of the standards and assessment committee was assigned the task of taking the activities language adopted by the school at the last staff meeting and writing the final language for the school's action plan. Four activities were written for submission to the district central office.

Liz:

And then we wrote our action plan. 242

Planning Participants—Committees

Faculty Advisory
The purpose of this group is to make budget and curriculum decisions. It is not considered a site council by the principal. Composition is six teachers (one from each grade level), two parents (volunteers), and the principal. Nine members include six certificated, two parent, one administrative.

Strategy Group
(Also known at the Strategies Task Force.)
The purpose of this group was to refine input from the staff meeting at which action plan activities (strategies) were generated. Composition is five teachers, three parents, one classified, and the principal. Ten members include five certificated, one classified, three parent, one administrative. The members are self-selected.

Planning for Results Team
The purpose of this group was to attend the National Alliance conference on planning for results. Composition is four teachers, one parent, and the principal. This was an ad hoc group that formed during this year. The members are self-selected.

Inservice Committee
The purpose of this group is to plan staff training activities. This group was responsible for planning part of the planning process. Composition is three teachers, one parent, and the principal.

Standards and Assessment Committee
Composition is undefined. Chaired by a teacher.

Technology Committee
Composition is three parents and an undefined number of teachers.

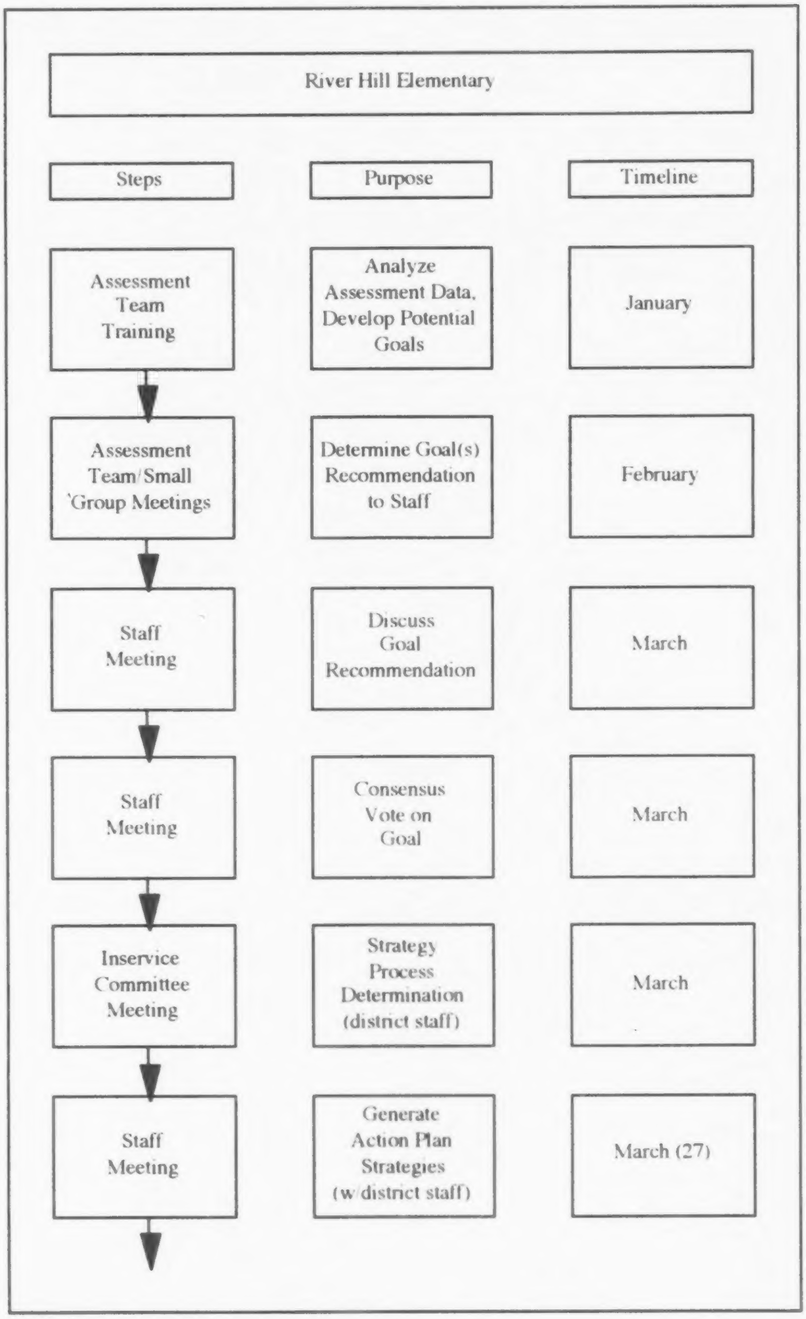
Discipline Committee
Composition is two parents and an undefined number of teachers.

Safety Committee
Composition is four parents and an undefined number of teachers.

Planning Participants

Teachers: Teachers serve on all committees at the school. Three teachers in particular figured prominently in the planning process as they attended the training activity at the outset of the year, and developed the goal recommendations for the rest of the staff and parents to decide upon.
Parents: Parents serve on all committees at the school. They also vote on all matters that come before the staff meeting.
Community: The community outside of the parent group is not mentioned in any way as an active constituency in the planning process and product.
Classified: Classified serve, or are eligible to serve, on all committees involved in the planning process.
Students: Students are not involved in the planning process.
Administration: The principal serves on all committees and leads the planning process.
Principal's Role: The principal's role in planning was not self-described.

Appendix R: River Hill Process Diagram



River Hill Elementary

Steps	Purpose	Timeline
Assessment Team Training	Analyze Assessment Data, Develop Potential Goals	January
Assessment Team/Small `Group Meetings	Determine Goal(s) Recommendation to Staff	February
Staff Meeting	Discuss Goal Recommendation	March
Staff Meeting	Consensus Vote on Goal	March
Inservice Committee Meeting	Strategy Process Determination (district staff)	March
Staff Meeting	Generate Action Plan Strategies (w/district staff)	March (27)

River Hill Elementary, Continued

Steps	Purpose	Timeline
Strategies Task Force Meeting	Process Staff Input, Select Strategies	May
Staff Meeting	Discuss Math Strategies (w/parents)	May (8)
Staff Meeting	Consensus Vote on Strategies	May (18)
Standards & Assessment Committee Chair	Write Final Action Plan	May

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1991 to present	VICE PRESIDENT, ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES, LAKE WASHINGTON TECHNICAL COLLEGE.
1985 - 1991	COORDINATOR, LAKE WASHINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT.
	ADMINISTRATOR, LAKE WASHINGTON VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE.
	SUPERVISOR, LAKE WASHINGTON VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE.
1980 - 1985	TEACHER-COORDINATOR, NORTHSHORE SCHOOL DISTRICT.
1980	INSTRUCTOR, EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY.
1977 - 1980	MARKET REPRESENTATIVE, FOUR-PHASE SYSTEMS, INC.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

1999	Doctor of Philosophy; University of Washington.
1997	Superintendent Certificate; University of Washington.
1989	Principal Certificate; Western Washington University.
1986	Vocational Administration Internship; Superintendent of Public Instruction.
1984	Master of Business Administration; Seattle University.
1980	Secondary and Vocational Education Certificates; Eastern Washington University.
1977	Bachelor of Arts, Majors in Economics and Business Administration; University of Puget Sound.